

TOP STORY: THE DANGERS OF DRY CLEANING  
October 18 - 31, 1993

# In THESE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

## BETTER DEAD THAN RED

YELTSIN KILLS DEMOCRACY  
IN ORDER TO SAVE IT.

Fred Weir reports

page 14

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# EDITORIAL

## CLINTON'S HEALTH PLAN IS BAD MEDICINE

In Bill Clinton's brilliant speech last month before Congress, he outlined a set of principles that health care reform advocates can only applaud. The aim of his plan, he said, was to guarantee that all Americans have access to quality health care, to simplify the system and to contain health care costs. But while these are the right goals, the plan Clinton outlined would be a bureaucratic nightmare. It would increase the cost of health care and would produce a multi-tiered system in which low- and middle-income working people are likely to be able to afford only limited coverage.

Clinton's "managed-competition" plan would complete the transformation of American medicine from a system that allows patients to choose, and change, doctors or hospitals into one tightly controlled by insurance giants. The plan would push all but the wealthy into stripped-down versions of HMOs. Patients would be given only limited choices among assigned and overworked physicians. The complex regulatory apparatus needed to monitor this system would only guarantee higher administrative costs.

Because the single-payer movement has steadily insisted on universal, quality care with choice, security and simplicity, Clinton found it politically impossible to propose anything less. But his unwillingness to challenge the power of the big five insurance companies made it impossible to devise a system that could deliver on his proposals. He could, and did, include things that cost little or nothing, and that don't threaten entrenched interests. Thus he adopted the grass-roots group Neighbor to Neighbor's idea of a universal health care card and he espoused a uniform insurance reporting form. But the complexity of the plan, which requires 245 pages for the "short" version, gives the game away.

In contrast, the Canadian single-payer plan does provide simplicity. It eliminates patient billing (doctors and hospitals bill the provincial authorities directly), sets up a single entity to negotiate prices with doctors and hospitals, puts no restrictions on consumers' choice of doctors or doctors' choice of treatment, and provides equal access to care for all citizens. Clinton says such a program would be impossible in the United States because a single-payer plan would

require \$500 billion in new taxes. But the savant idiots who have advised him on this plan surely know that the same \$500 billion now goes to insurance companies to pay premiums. Indeed, as the U.S. Government Accounting Office reported two years ago, a single-payer system could save enough in administrative costs to pay for universal coverage without any increase in overall cost. In other words, the \$500 billion now paid for insurance premiums would be enough to pay for all of the country's medical needs.

Under Clinton's plan, only a few industry giants, such as Aetna and Prudential, would be able to assemble the extensive networks needed to negotiate prices for giant pools of citizens. That's why the Health Insurance Association of America (the organization of 1,500 smaller companies) opposes Clinton's plan. And it's why a Prudential executive describe managed competition as "the best-case scenario for reform—preferable even to the status quo." And small wonder. If the administration proposal is adopted, five insurance company giants will own one-seventh of the American economy. And we can expect them to compete over prices in the same way the Big Three auto companies do—which is to say, not at all.

Clinton, of course, knows this, but he demagogically attacks the "special interests" in the insurance industry as if he were actually challenging its dominant companies.

And that's not all. By 1995 Clinton would give nearly \$300 billion a year in new business to the big five companies. He would include in his plan Medicaid enrollees whose public program now runs a 4 percent overhead, as well as the currently uninsured, whose care does not now benefit insurance companies. These companies run a 14 percent overhead. Overall, that would mean a \$31.4 billion increase in administrative costs for health care.

Then, too, Clinton would set up a new layer of bureaucracy—the health alliances, which under the plan would function as middlemen between small business and individuals and insurers. These alliances would also negotiate and monitor quality of care and risk-selection. They would set fees, collect premiums from millions of employers and hundreds of millions of individuals, and verify eligibility for premium subsidies available to the 45.6 million people whose incomes are at or below 150 percent of poverty. All of this will cost additional billions of dollars. In short, because Clinton's plan will greatly increase administrative costs, it will not be able to provide universal coverage. White House lieutenants are already talking about delaying coverage of the uninsured.

All of these problems follow from Clinton's refusal to consider a single-payer system. Thus, an effort that started out to help solve our health care crisis may well end up so discrediting government that it will make real reform impossible for decades to come. ◀

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## LETTERS

## Toxic

I want to express my disappointment in your article about the dissolution of the National Toxics Campaign Fund (NTCF) (*ITT*, Sept. 6). The author, William Burke, has written a critique that is both shallow in its analysis and dishonest in its presentation.

The thrust of the article is that I couldn't accept criticism and organized my allies on the board to silence people who challenged my authority. The author also assumes that I orchestrated the dissolution of NTCF and convinced the board to go along with me. Do you really want your audience to believe that the board of NTCF, which included activists that have been in the civil rights, labor rights, farmworker and environmental movements for decades, just blindly followed my direction and dissolved their own organization? Do you think they would have dissolved NTCF if they believed the organization was effectively serving the movement? You insult

the experience, wisdom and organizing ability of many people on NTCF's board. The fact is that there were many people on both the board and staff who discussed for months prior to the last board meeting how to salvage what was best in the organization. I was one among many voices.

Moreover, if the board believed I was the cause of the organization's woes, why didn't they just ask me to leave? I would have gladly left. It would have been much easier for me to walk out the door rather than stay and participate in NTCF's dissolution, knowing there would be attempts to scapegoat me from people who acted destructively and dishonestly within the organization.

The shallowness of the author's analysis does a disservice to movement activists who could learn many lessons from the life and death of NTCF. But the author's dishonesty in not reporting divergent voices is just bad journalism. The author chooses to repeat the allegations against me that

were brought by Mr. Witt and Ms. Bailey, but he fails to mention that these allegations were evaluated by the NTCF Executive Committee and found to be groundless. Additionally, when talking to the author, I strongly encouraged him to interview many other people on the board and staff to hear different voices regarding NTCF's demise. However, the article contains no quotes from any board members who voted to dissolve NTCF, including no members of the Executive Committee or the People of Color Caucus.

It is clear the author has other concerns besides the truth he wishes to champion in his piece, but in the process he has further weakened the credibility of *In These Times* as a reliable voice for progressive issues and deprived its readers of important lessons that would benefit many organizations working for social change.

Gary Cohen

Former Executive Director  
National Toxics Campaign Fund

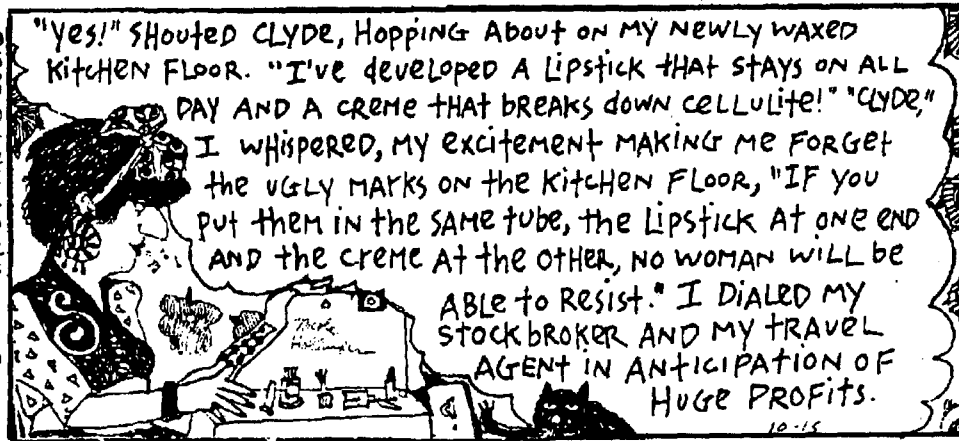
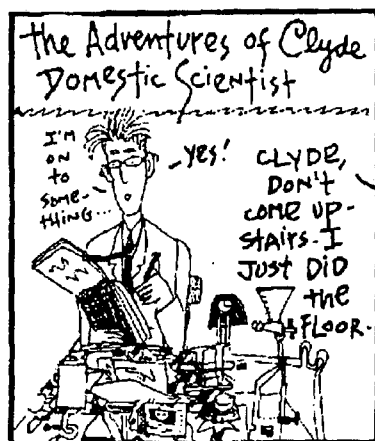
*Editor's note: Contrary to Cohen's assertion, Burke did, in fact, discuss the Executive Committee's response to the Witt and Bailey charges.*

## Toxic management

I hope that people reading the *In These Times* article "Bad chemistry" (Sept. 6) do not get the impression that

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



the National Toxics Campaign Fund (NTCF) dissolved due to personality conflicts. Historically, individuals who voiced disagreement with NTCF policies and practices were blackballed, but this only compelled us to rally together and pressure NTCF to reform.

After blocking NTCF board member Rand Wilson (Boston executive director of Jobs for Justice) in his attempts to induce the staff to join a company-dominated union, I joined a caucus of staff and board members concerned about the mismanagement of NTCF staff and finances. Starting over two years ago, we petitioned our co-workers, supervisors, Chairman John O'Connor, Executive Director Gary Cohen and, finally, the board. Despite being harassed, "laid off," libeled and deprived of resources, we persisted in these efforts to expose the corruption at NTCF in hopes of rejuvenating the organization into a fair and honest democratic body.

I believe that by the spring of 1993, management found it difficult to hide the corruption within NTCF from the environmental movement, granting foundations and the media. I further believe that the subsequent "dissolution" was an attempt to avoid the responsibilities for huge debts and past unfair, illegal and unethical management practices.

Mary E. Waygan  
Citizens Environmental Laboratory  
(Former NTCF staff)

## National Toxics and democracy

William Burke's story, "Bad chemistry," on the dissolution of the National Toxics Campaign Fund (NTCF) was interesting but lacked details that might have made it more understandable to those not directly involved.

Lack of space prevents me from citing the many glaring examples of undemocratic actions I witnessed in my four years on the board of the National Toxics Campaign. It was a

most disillusioning experience. But thanks for presenting this story.

The conclusion that the environmental movement has something to learn from the NTCF example is on target. The organization collapsed from lack of democracy and factions with totally diverse philosophies. One side believed in the democratic rights of grass-roots citizens; the other felt that money justified dictatorial powers (gag rules, etc.).

Recently Peter Montague, in *Hazardous Waste News*, recommended that Ralph Nader and Lois Gibbs start a campaign to train children in citizen participation. I recommend that they hold seminars for grass-roots *adults*—teach them about their rights and responsibilities when serving on local, state or national boards.

Early on, grass-roots activists should learn their rights and how to exercise them. They should not be afraid to express opinions that differ from the majority view because in *democratic* groups minority viewpoints are respected and valued. Some may also need to learn that the executive director and other staff are hired and directed by the board, not vice versa.

Building democratic organizations is not easy. But if the leadership does not know how to go about it, the group is ultimately doomed to failure. Funders might also ask more questions about how groups are run and require more accountability for the money they dole out.

Irene V. Gillis  
Brookline, Mass.

## Funding abortions

John B. Judis indeed is correct that including abortion services—as well as other reproductive health care services like birth control and counseling, STDs and perhaps even AIDS treatment—will be problematical in the coming health care reform (ITT, Aug. 9). But he's wrong about everything else. The language in the Free-

dom of Choice Act (FOCA) is the codification of *Roe vs. Wade*, with allowances for states to impose parental consent laws and deny state funds for abortions. This is far from "unequivocal" or "abortion on demand," as its opponents say. Indeed, the language is so puny that FOCA could barely be said to protect any woman except rich white ones. That is why Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun (D-IL) withdrew her support.

Only 15 percent of the American public are anti-abortion zealots; 35-40 percent support the right under *all* circumstances. The rest are in the confused middle who support "restrictions," except, of course, if and when it hits home for them or those they love. Then they're just like George Bush—if it's someone near and dear, then, of course, the woman has made the right decision and they support it. In essence, the vast majority of the American people are pro-choice when it comes to themselves.

The taxpayer argument is a red herring. People who don't drive pay taxes on roads; they pay taxes on schools when they don't have school-age children.

Even now, public funds are used to treat conditions that are the results of behavior some people feel are caused by morally suspect activities—for example, smoking, which causes lung cancer.

The argument that some portion of the populace would find using taxpayers' money to treat people who engage in "morally dubious" behavior crumbles under the weight of this analysis. Government is a social contract we make with each other without which society cannot function.

In addition, Judis neglects to mention that most private insurance includes abortion for the 70 percent of American women who are presently insured. Therefore, women would lose a right they now possess. If abortion is not included in the health care reform, then it could have the same long-term effect as making it illegal.

Debra Cooper



# InSHORT



ILLUSTRATION BY TERRY LABAN

## YOUTH MOVEMENT

*Street gangs take part in street protests*

A massive crowd of demonstrators—mostly black and young—shut down Chicago's Loop late last month in a protest to demand action on the city's continuing public education crisis. The group's large numbers—estimated at between 6,000 and 10,000 people—caught city leaders and the police department by surprise. But in addition to the sheer size of the demonstration, the event was significant because it represented the first tangible sign of a wide-scale rebirth of political activism among African-American youth. What's more, many members of so-called street gangs were among the participants, offering evidence that the goals enunciated by the "United in Peace" gang truce movement (see *In These Times*, April 18, 1993) were more than just rhetorical bluster.



By Woody Igou

## Shop till you drop

A busload of Russian shoppers adamantly refused to alter or stop a shopping trip to Poland when one of their members died of a heart attack, according to Reuters.



After failing to obtain permission from Soviet authorities to bury the individual on the spot, the bargain-hungry group continued to shop for days, leaving the corpse in the rear of the bus.

*Sorry I missed that Adam Smith tour of Poland.*

## Oedipus Lex

In Trenton, N.J., a court recently ruled that a man named Thomas Huckfeldt would be required to pay attorney's fees for his two



teenage sons after finding that the family is too well off to obtain a public defender.

Huckfeldt's sons are charged with trying to hire a hit man to kill him.

*Wait till the bill comes from the divorce lawyer!*

## No shit!

The *Bangkok Post* reports that a fourth grade teacher work-

ing In China's Hubei province forced students to eat cow dung as punishment when they failed to turn in homework or didn't pay attention. Only two students with good



grades—and five who were related to the teacher—escaped the punishment.

Some students became ill, and authorities noted that this "affected the normal studying process." The teacher was jailed.

Another promising new Olympic event down the drain.

### Special-interest glaucoma

After Texas Republican Rep. Bill Sarpalius voted to support President Clinton's budget proposal, Baptist Pastor Kent



York was quoted as saying, "We didn't send you to Washington to make intelli-

gent decisions. We sent you to represent us."

Yup, the "big picture" is a wallet-sized photo of his Aunt Ethel.

*Stunned by a stupid statement? Nauseated by a noxious news item? Livid about a ludicrous lie? Contact the Appall-O-Meter, In These Times, 2040 N. Milwaukee, Chicago, IL. 60647.*

### APPALL-O-METER SCALE

1. Weightless banality
2. Green Acres stupid
3. Malicious cretinism
4. Howard Sternesque
5. Mary Matalin mean
6. Gangrenous venality
7. A touch of evil
8. A cancer in the Zeitgeist
9. Et tu, Pol Pot?
10. Horseperson of the Apocalypse

Thomas Harris—spokesman for 21st Century Vote, the group that was primarily responsible for organizing the demonstration's youth contingent—is convinced that the Loop protest marked the beginning of a new era. Harris is particularly critical of black and white political leaders who fail to include the concerns of lower-income constituents on their agendas. He blames inattentive and ineffective leadership for the accelerating rate of decay in many black communities. "Traditional black leadership has lost the respect and allegiance of black youth," he says.

The protest was the culmination of efforts by a wide coalition of groups acting in concert to dramatize their concern for the continuing crisis in the city's public education system. Members of the coalition are urging the appropriate officials to craft a permanent settlement that will allow the system's 411,000 students to attend classes without the constant threat of a school shutdown hanging over their heads.

Chicago's schools were closed on the scheduled opening day because the system faced a budget deficit of \$299 million, and state law requires the city's school system to present a balanced budget every year. Schools were allowed to open the following week and, as *In These Times* went to press, remained open only because of temporary federal court orders waiving the balanced-budget requirement. This impasse was the major impetus for the increase in youth activism, but now that their energy has been tapped, several additional issues have been targeted.

All of the involved organizers credit the United In Peace movement for reorienting youth gang—or, as they prefer, "nation"—members into the direction of community empowerment. The marchers also chanted "no school, no vote," emphasizing their new interest in becoming involved in the electoral process and in holding elected officials accountable for their lack of effectiveness on a wide range of issues. To this end, former state Rep. Jerry Washington has signed on to 21st Century Vote as a political consultant. Washington said he had no problem aligning himself with a group that many police and media pundits condemn as gang-affiliated.

After working in the state legislature from 1984 to 1987, Washington said he became frustrated with lawmakers' lack of concern for the growing rates of incarceration of young African-Americans and the reflexive condemnation of any youth involved in street gangs. "Rather than sit on my high horse and condemn these youths, like so many black and white politicians love to do, I thought it would be more effective to reach out to these grass-roots young people trapped in these decaying communities and help them find ways to alleviate that decay. Change must start at the bottom," he says.

—Salim Muwakkil

## NAFTA'S NOSEDIVE

*Lawmakers are fleeing the free trade pact*

Administration officials now concede that if the House of Representatives were to vote on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) this month, it would not pass. In the past weeks, the administration has not only lost a key Democrat—Majority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-MO)—but also scores of Republicans. Last summer, the Republican leadership counted 120 votes for NAFTA. Now they can claim only about 75.

Some Republicans have been defecting because they don't want to help Clinton carry a vote against his own party. But others have been bothered by reaction back home. When Rep. John Kasich (R-OH), one of the party's young Turks, went back to his small-town Ohio district last August, he found nothing but opposition to NAFTA. "Real people have real concerns about NAFTA," he declared upon returning. Kasich claims publicly he has become undecided, but he has privately told one fellow lawmaker that he opposes the treaty.

In announcing his own opposition September 18, Gephardt deflected questions about how strenuously he would use his power in the House to oppose the treaty, but House aides say that he is actively campaigning against the treaty. "He's going after people really strongly, taking them to dinner, twisting arms," said the staff member to one lawmaker.

Meanwhile, the administration still hasn't produced a dislocated workers' bill—the key requirement for getting Democratic votes. Robert Reich's Labor Department has been drafting a bill since March. But, complains one department official, department officials have gone about it as if they were a team of sociologists producing a research report.

—John B. Judis

## DELIVERING THE GOODS

*Carey comes through on Teamsters' UPS contract*

Ron Carey, the reform-minded Teamsters president (See *In These Times*, September 20), fared well in his first big contract-negotiation test. The Teamsters won solid gains on most fronts in negotiations on behalf of

165,000 union members at United Parcel Service (UPS).

The monetary gains—\$1 an hour each year for four years of the contract, roughly split between wages and benefits—should guarantee all UPS workers the option to retire with full benefits after 25 years. But the wage hike does little to narrow the big hourly pay gap between full- and part-time workers—a major concession that Carey's predecessors had granted the company in the '80s.

Carey's most significant victories in the UPS negotiations reflect a new direction for the Teamsters—strengthening worker rights and union power on the job. In a historic breakthrough, UPS workers will be considered innocent until proven guilty of most disciplinary charges. Teamsters for a Democratic Union—a reform wing of the labor organization—had long advocated such protection. There are also new powers and rights for union stewards, as well as limits on harassment. Among the other new guarantees are improvements in health and safety.

In addition, Teamsters negotiators successfully resisted company demands for givebacks. They also guaranteed that UPS drivers—or, in rare cases, Teamster freight drivers—would operate the company's new three-day package-delivery service, not non-union contractors. The contract should also guarantee increased full-time work opportunities for part-time workers.

The old Teamster leadership had often allowed management a free hand on the job. Carey seems determined to put the union back on the shop floor as well as at the bargaining table.

—David Moberg

## MEDIA BEAT

By Pat Aufderheide

### Banning Joe

Is Joe Camel going into retirement? Joe, a cigarette-toting phallic symbol, is notorious as a seducer of the young.

More than half of all kids between 3 and 6 can associate the cartoon advertising character with a cigarette. And under-age smokers—the under-13 crowd—are moving toward the Camel brand.

You can see why a cigarette manufacturer, many of whose most committed customers die premature deaths from the drug, needs new converts. And you can see why concerned citizen groups would have petitioned the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to act against Joe. But until now the FTC has been mum. Now its staff has recommended a ban on the Joe Camel campaign, and the advertising industry is on pins and needles waiting to find out what the FTC's judgment will be.

### The public what?

The notion that communications providers serve not only their own but the public interest, a fundamental precept of the 1934 Communications Act, is under relentless attack. The public-interest obligation was originally based on the notion that since the airwaves are public, broadcasters owe the public something in return for getting exclusive license to use them. New technologies that don't use public airwaves, however, don't require a broadcast license. Take, for example, DBS, or direct broadcast satellite. A budding rival to cable, DBS uses satellites to send signals directly to the consumer, who needs a small receiving dish. The 1992 Cable Act had attempted to impose



a public-interest obligation on DBS to make a small percentage of its channels available to educational or non-commercial interests. But a late September court judgment stripped DBS of that obligation. The court argued that the requirement impinged on DBSers' First Amendment rights. The judgment was another reminder that freedom of expression belongs to those who own the mediums of expression.

### They're everywhere

Advertisers are experimenting with ever more arcane spots for their messages. One of them: your computer screen. According to *Ad Vice*, the quarterly newsletter of the Center for the Study of Commercialism (1875 Connecticut Ave. NW, #300, Washington, DC, 20009), "screen saver" devices may soon have commercials built into them. The ads disappear only when you hit another key. Another possible advertising forum, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, is Internet, the sprawling computer network that links universities and other organizations. Until now, Internet has been commercial-free.

### Cutting out the middleman

Networks have always chosen television shows with a shrewd eye to its demographic appeal—and what that means to advertisers. But now advertisers are going directly to producers, making their own programming and then taking the whole package to the networks. This puts advertisers squarely in the driver's seat in program design, instead of the traditional backseat-driving role.

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## TAX GUZZLERS

*A civilian Star Wars for U.S. auto companies*

for promises that the companies would "strive to build a car that goes three times farther than current models on the same amount of fuel." Developed at taxpayers' expense by Cold War weapons laboratories, these technologies are being used to subsidize the auto companies in a large-scale welfare program that involves minimal risks for the companies, but potentially huge profits for its executives and stockholders.

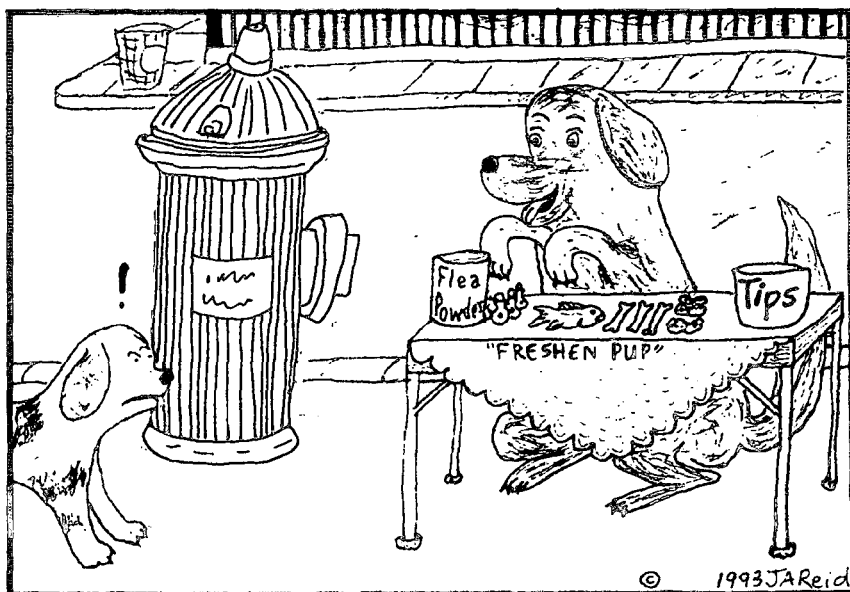
The auto companies are delighted about this joint public-private undertaking, and why not? The federal Advanced Research Projects Agency will provide designs for super-efficient motors and fuel cells and the Army Tank Command will provide "virtual design and prototyping." Financing will be split, with Washington (which is to say the public) paying for the "riskier long-term projects," and the car companies taking over if the project ever comes close to profitability.

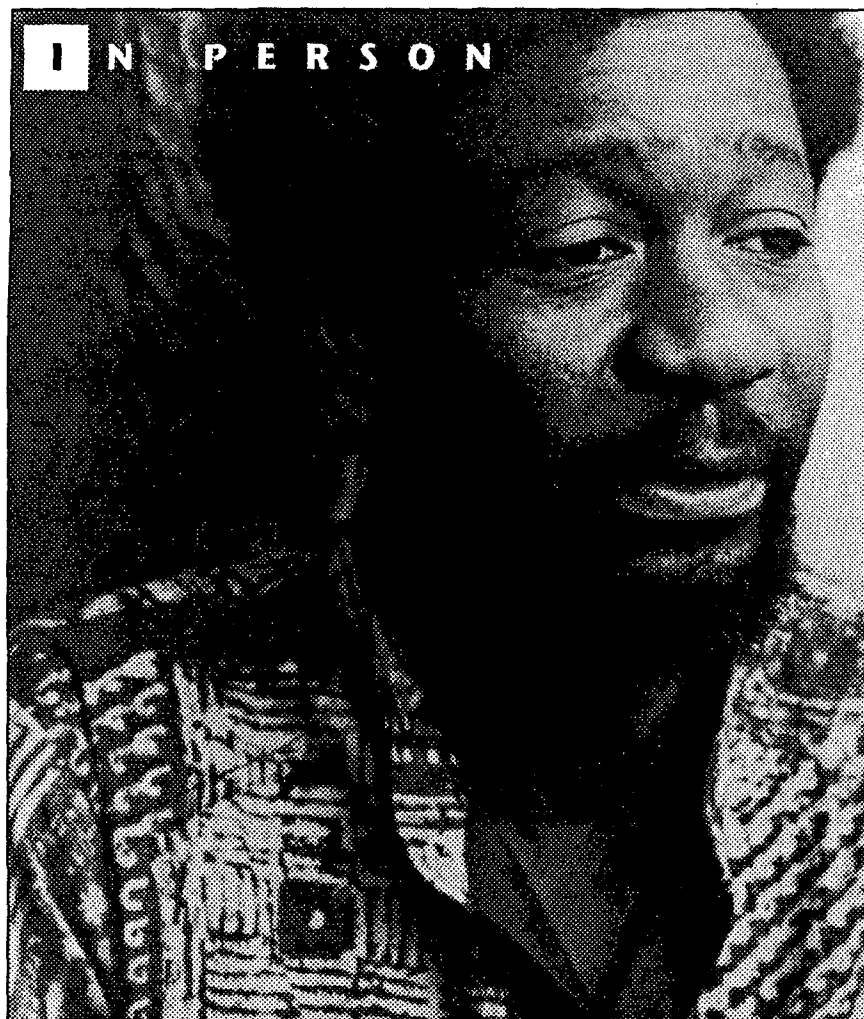
The rationale given for this latest gift to the greedy, according to a draft summary of the agreement prepared by the White House, is that "risks are so high and rewards so delayed that the U.S. industry could not afford the investment." But while the administration presents this handout to the industry as a conversion of the military to civilian production, the effect is to preserve in place the scientists and laboratories that are idle because the development of weapons has been scaled back. The administration is at pains to explain that this work will not increase total research spending. However, it neglects to say that substantial savings in the military budget could be achieved simply by disbanding these research facilities. The money saved could be then used for more urgently needed and socially desirable projects, rather than for the civilian equivalent of Star Wars.

—James Weinstein

### ROUGH CUTS

By JA Reid





## NIGERIA'S HAVEL?

*Wole Soyinka stands  
against dictatorship*

Author Wole Soyinka speaks with the passion and conviction of a politician on the stump, but he is best known as the Nigerian playwright who won the 1986

Nobel Prize in Literature, the first black African awarded that honor.

Soyinka is the embodiment of the emerging Africa: a descendant of the Yoruba tribe, though a child of Christians, he aims to speak to a universal audience. His vigorous advocacy of political freedom led to his imprisonment by the Nigerian government for two years in the late '60s, an experience described in the political-literary diary, *The Man Died*.

Soyinka's cruel imprisonment has not deterred him from politics. His most recent confrontation occurred after a political tour this summer, when he was detained by Nigerian authorities while trying to re-enter Nigeria. Soyinka had spent several weeks in Washington and Europe as an advocate for Nigerian democracy. He met with State Department officials responsible for African affairs and attended hearings on Nigeria on Capitol Hill.

Specifically, he came to campaign for international pressure to be put on Nigeria's military junta, which at the time was led by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida and has since been replaced by Babangida's hand-picked interim government.

Nigeria held a presidential election on June 12 that many hoped would be

ETC.

By Miles Harvey

## Love/hate diplomacy

Question: Just who is Gen. Mohamed Farrah Aidid, the U.S. government's archenemy in Somalia? Answer: The same man who, just a few months ago, was being trumpeted as one of the U.S. government's best friends in Somalia.

A fine analysis of this love affair gone sour appeared in the September 3 edition of Toronto's *Globe and Mail*. "A few months ago, Gen. Aidid happily played the part of father of his nation, champion of the poor, promoter of democracy," reporter John Stackhouse explains. "Now, Central Casting has him on America's Most Wanted. ... Not that he himself has changed. Just about everyone working in Somalia considered him a ruthless brute last year, and the year before that."

A former shepherd boy who had scratched his way to the rank of ambassador to India, Aidid returned to Somalia in 1989. There, Stackhouse writes, "Gen. Aidid saw a new order in the making. The United States was fast withdrawing its support for Gen. Said Barre [Somalia's dictator from 1969-1991]. ... And so, he took up arms as leader of the rebel United Somali Congress." Last fall, Aidid's forces suffered a major defeat to another armed group, and were forced to retreat to Mogadishu. "But fortune would smile again on Aidid, in the form of Operation Restore Hope," Stackhouse observes. "In a chaotic country, the Americans needed the support of local leaders. ... In private,



Robert Oakley, the former U.S. envoy to Somalia, made no secret of his distaste for [Aldid]. He considered him a belligerent, self-serving and perhaps mentally unstable thug. But war had created a necessity."

### **Cognitive dissonance**

*Chicago Sun-Times* front-page headline for Oct. 5, 1993:

"Yeltsin in control; boost for democracy seen." *Chicago Tribune* front-page headline for the same day: "Yeltsin shackles foes, democracy."

### **A retraction**

I would like to apologize for my ill-considered criticism of the tobacco industry in the October 4 "Etc." column. I hope no smokers were personally offended.

### **A news item**

A woman ordered to stub out her cigarette in a San Pablo, Calif., restaurant last month returned with a gun and killed one of the patrons who had complained. "While no one can condone that violence, a possible explanation of it is the kind of nasty, state-sponsored ads they bombard Californians with that ridicule smokers," explains Thomas Lauria of the Tobacco Institute, an industry-sponsored group.

### **Another news item**

The Interfax news agency reports that Alexander Rutskoi and Ruslan Khasbulatov, leaders of the armed Russian uprising, were allowed to smoke in prison after their arrest. "This is important, as both Rutskoi and Khasbulatov are heavy smokers," Interfax reports.

a landmark for African democracy. Instead, Babangida annulled the vote and created his own interim council before stepping down on August 26. The council chair, Ernest Shonekan, is the head of Nigeria's largest conglomerate. The council's number two position is held by a leading military figure. Most analysts believe, however, that it is Babangida who still controls the government. Democracy activists have hit the streets in protest against the "puppet" Shonekan; some have been arrested.

"Nigerians were strung along by Babangida, who had been spending millions of Nigerian naira [Nigerian currency] on this supposedly fabulous transition-to-democracy program," says Soyinka. "But what is clear now is that the program's only purpose was to retain himself and his cronies in power."

Moshood Abiola, the Nigerian businessman elected president in the annulled June election, has also decried the developments. He, like Soyinka, has been trying to pressure other governments to put the heat on Nigeria to uphold the results of the election.

What would Soyinka have the U.S. government do? "I believe Nigeria should be subject to sanctions, embargos, isolation and quarantine as befitting a rogue government," he told State Department officials. "We don't want any special excuses because Nigeria is an African nation, with special 'African' problems preventing it from having democracy. That kind of thinking needs to stop permanently. The people have voted. One candidate won."

In contrast to some other African intellectuals, Soyinka believes it is entirely appropriate for the United States to have input in the internal affairs of his country. "I am not calling for the U.S. alone to help," he says. "I am calling for an international movement."

Soyinka disagrees with those African leaders who believe that international action in Africa is a form of neo-colonialism. "The government of Nigeria invited international monitors to be present at the June election. For Nigeria to turn around now and say that this is their internal business and not the business of the world would just be hypocritical," he says. "It is not possible to talk anymore about the noncontingent existence of any nation, much less a Third World one."

For all his political passion and élan, Soyinka claims not to have ambitions to be Nigeria's Vaclav Havel. "I do not consider myself a politician," he says. "But I do feel that I must be on the side of democracy, egalitarianism and social justice." In fact, Soyinka did not even vote in the June election, despite his interest in politics. "I did not feel it was fully democratic. I disapproved of the rigged system where both parties were created by the government and had their manifestos written for them. But I agree with the endpoint, which is to get rid of the military government."

Despite the power of the non-elected regime, Soyinka finds some seeds of hope in the political process. The voting patterns from the June election suggest that Nigerians transcended their ethnic and religious differences. And that shatters the conventional wisdom that any attempt to create democracy in Africa will fissure along tribal lines.

And though not ready to stand for office, Soyinka refuses to be muzzled. "I must stand fierce about my belief in the right of the people to govern themselves, their right to choose," he says. "I feel that military despots such as these are the very same as the colonial despots. There is no difference in the force of tyranny, whether it is forced upon a people from outside or from within."

—April Oliver

# THE FIRST STONE

## LET THEM EAT

By Joel Bleifuss

Working to change society as a community organizer, as a not-for-profit administrator or as a journalist in the alternative press, you learn that it is possible to improve life in a neighborhood, and from there the world. In the process of doing your work you see that the strictures of the established order are not as suffocating as they first seem. These realizations are liberating and enriching—well, to a point.

People do not live on psychic benefits alone. Unfortunately for many people doing non-profit work, a living wage is almost an oxymoron. And that raises the question: is there a relationship between salaries and social change? More bluntly, is the U.S. left getting in return exactly what it pays?—that is, not much.

Kim Fellner has put a lot of thought into this subject. Over the years, she has organized workers for the Service Employees Union, the Screen Actors Guild (under Ed Asner) and the National Writers Union. Currently Fellner is working with the National Organizers Alliance, a group that will be born at a “founding gathering” in 1994. (See “In Short,” Feb. 8, 1993.) Plans are to build an organization that will nurture the psychological as well as the material needs of community and union organizers. Some of these organizers work for big not-for-profit corporations, others for small local organizations, but what almost all have in common is low pay and meager benefits.

“The culture of organizing is very ambivalent on the issue of benefits and decent pay,” says Fellner. “A lot of that is based on the belief that in order to have true movement zeal, you shouldn’t be too comfortable.”

Such an attitude, according to Fellner, stems from three historical developments. First, in the ’50s and ’60s people understandably looked to the “pork choppers” in organized labor as a model to avoid. “There was a common perception that the kiss of death for unions was when the jobs the union offered became substantially more comfortable than the jobs on the shop floor,” says Fellner. “The union staff began living so well they couldn’t do the work of the movement. Conse-

quently, there is the fear that improving the wages and benefits of organizers might have the same deadening effect.”

In the ’60s and early ’70s, Fellner notes, many activists made the mistake of assuming that the revolution was around the corner. “We now realize that the struggle for social and economic justice we are now part of is not only one lifetime of work but many,” says Fellner. “And that realization changes the structural needs of organizations.”

But effective long-range organizing requires special management skills—qualities that were not always valued by a middle-class left that shunned “business” and held the egalitarian illusion that everyone could be an expert. Ken Rollings, a veter-

an community organizer who is now associate director at the Woods Charitable Trust in Chicago, put it this way: “Many of us went into this line of work, and we didn’t know personnel policy. We wanted to do something. Then when we became directors of organizations, we were not aware of how to treat employees. Wages and salaries and rules that govern the workplace were not part of our training.”

Finally, Fellner, like many others, observes that the organizing community has been strongly influenced by religious ideals that exalt selfless toil to benefit the common good. This faith in sacrifice, when stripped of the spirit, holds that the ends justify the means—that social change justifies exploiting human labor.

Fellner, however, believes that the religious model does have something to offer other than “the vocational feeling of heading down the road to martyrdom.” And that is the example of religious orders. Says Fellner, “It is worth looking at the way religious orders deal with these issues.”

The premiere issue of *The Ark*, the National Organizer’s Alliance newsletter, raises the possibility of starting a secular order, or guild, for organizers. Mike Miller, who was trained years ago by Saul Alinsky, is quoted as saying, “If I were 20 and starting all over again. I’d want to start something that was the equivalent of a religious order for organizers. A community of organizers would be responsible for the retirement and health care of their people.”

But if Miller were really starting all over again, his idealism might become a bit battered. For example, say he was fresh out of college doing an internship at one of Washington’s not-for-profit foundations. A former Nader employee related her first experience going to Washington to work as an intern: “Initially it was all upper-class, Ivy League students. I was the only one from a middle-income family. They weren’t any brighter than anyone else but they had enough money so they didn’t have to work someplace else. They could have time to complete projects. At night they’d say, ‘Let’s go out to a bar.’ And we’d all go out, but I’d go



to my job as a waitress."

At least she could afford to be an intern by working a second job. If she'd had the financial burden of student loans, she says such an internship would have been impossible.

After years in the Nader organization, this woman worked her way up to a "top management position" where, in the mid-'80s, she made \$15,000 a year and lived in a group house. She says, "I understand the dangers of having a bloated public interest community in Washington, but that was ridiculous."

Todd Steiner, director of the Sea Turtle Restoration Project at the Earth Island Institute in San Francisco, says that it's time to practice what we preach. "The tendency is to take enthusiastic young people, grind them up, use them up and spit them out," he says. "When they want to have a family and stop living in group houses, then they have to go out and have a real job. We all talk a lot about sustainable environment, but are we trying to make the jobs sustainable?"

Steiner's concerns are echoed by Fellner. "I think there has been a feeling in part of the movement that it is acceptable to chew people up—get them out of college, work them to death for two years, and when they get tired of it, get another group of young people and work them to death. The result is that you have a revolving door instead of a growing force."

Sandy O'Donnell, a professor of public administration at Chicago's Roosevelt University, specializes in non-profit administration. "We're trying to convince our students to get master's degrees in non-profit work," she says. "Our major difficulty in recruiting students is their belief that there are not good career paths in this field. The truth is, they are probably right. There is a pyramid, a very flat pyramid, with a few well-paying, good-benefit jobs on the top and the rest on the bottom."

The Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste, of Falls Church, Va., was founded by Lois Gibbs in 1981. It now employs 13 people. "I am a passionately committed person. I adjust my lifestyle to the income I make," says Gibbs, who now earns \$40,000. "But it is just very difficult to keep quality people. That is why you have so much turnover in the non-profit world. At a certain age people start looking at their responsibilities—a house, children, college."

Gibbs is worried that the Clearinghouse will soon lose its national organizing director, a man in his early 30s whose salary is in the low 20s and who has plans to get married. "Private com-

panies pay their secretaries \$23,000. How long am I going to keep him at that kind of money?"

It's the kind of question we at *In These Times* have been asking ourselves a lot. After many rounds of pay cuts and layoffs, only one employee here makes more than \$22,000. These low wages have been partly responsible for the resignations of some of our best staff members. Almost none of our current freelance writers get paid for their work—and the publication still owes tens of thousands in old debts to freelancers. Whether *In These Times* will be around to see the New Year depends on the success of our ongoing refinancing campaign.

Our problems are not unique. Elsewhere in the country, hundreds of non-profit organizations are looking to the New Year with crossed fingers. It's ridiculous to tell such groups that raising salaries will solve their immediate problems. Yet many of these organizations might have been able to avert their financial crises had they been able to bank on the skills of experienced, well-trained workers. A here-today-gone-tomorrow workforce often leads to a here-today-gone-tomorrow operation.

The left has to recognize that it has been caught in a self-defeating cycle. How this Catch-22 could be overcome will be the subject of my column in our next issue.

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## THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

by Peter Hannan



**R U S S I A**

# The guns of October

**T**

he flames that engulfed the Russian parliament building may have also destroyed Russia's four-year-old experiment with democracy. Russia is reverting to a police state.

Opposition newspapers, parties and movements have been banned. Not only the national parliament but many local councils are being closed down by armed troops.

None of this was inevitable. Until quite literally the last moment there was ample ground for compromise between Yeltsin and his parliamentary foes—until a storm of gunfire blew it away.

The defenders of the White House were not “communist hard-liners”—though that is how Yeltsin and the Western media have chosen to characterize them. All of the deputies to the Russian parliament were elected in multi-candidate contests in 1990,

arguably the first free and fair elections in a thousand years of Russian history.

If they are “holdovers” from Soviet days, as they have often been described in the media, then so is Yeltsin: both the parliament and the president were elected during Soviet times, under the existing constitution of the Russian Federation. And both the president and the majority in parliament are ex-Communists.

Far from being die-hard Communists, however, the bulk of the deputies were staunch Yeltsin supporters until not long ago: many of them, including Speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov and Vice President Alexander Rutskoi, stood shoulder to shoulder with Yeltsin in opposition to the hard-line coup of August 1991. The deputies elected Yeltsin the parliament chairman in 1990; overwhelmingly passed the constitutional amendments that launched him into the presidency the next year; stood by him during the abortive coup in August 1991 and later voted him sweeping emergency powers to

introduce economic reform.

What separated the former allies, as the Russian reforms unfolded, were the sort of differences that are usually negotiable in a democratic environment: disagreements over the pace of economic reform, over the aims of foreign policy (see story on page 18) and the extent of state intervention in the market. Both sides, ironically, favored new elections—the parliament calling for a simultaneous presidential and parliamentary vote, Yeltsin insisting that presidential elections had to follow legislative ones by six months.

These sorts of differences were less important than the problem of power. In Russia, as in the Soviet Union, he who controls the apparatus in Moscow controls the country. In the absence of a firm hand on the bureaucratic levers of central power, regions were unilaterally grabbing local sovereignty and freelance groups of businessmen and organized criminals were almost literally looting the economy.

Yeltsin might have chosen to share power with parliament according to the existing constitution that, however cumbersome, did define a workable division of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial branches. He might have even effected sweeping constitutional change. Under Yeltsin's chairmanship, a parliamentary drafting commission had nearly completed work on a new Western-style charter that defined Russia as a parliamentary republic and guaranteed fundamental freedoms. (See *In These Times*, July 12, 1993.) The chief architect of that document, liberal deputy Oleg Rummyantsev, had been a key Yeltsin ally in parliament until barely six months ago. On October 4, he was dragged from the Russian parliament building (known as the White House) like an animal and jailed.

Under circumstances similar to Russia's, Poland had nav-

*Russia's democratic hopes have been blown away in a hail of gunfire.*

By Fred Weir  
MOSCOW





igated the transition from communism with a parliament largely appointed by the old regime as part of the deal. President Lech Walesa fumed, and flirted with ideas of autocratic presidential power, but ultimately accepted constitutionality and the rule of law. Outvoted in the recent elections, he will step down and ask former Communists, the election victors, to form a new government.

Why did it work out differently in Russia? One explanation is the character of Yeltsin himself. "The irony of Yeltsin's role is that a man with great energy for destroying came to power at a time when building was needed," Jonathan Steele of the *Manchester Guardian* points out. "The result is another Russian tragedy, and the end of the country's fourth period of reform."

Indeed, Russia's history for the past two years has been a virtual chronology of confrontation, in most cases initiated by an angry and impatient president, chafing under the sort of parliamentary restraint that is considered normal in democratic countries. Yeltsin, after a lifetime as a Commu-

nist apparatchik, appears incapable of internalizing fundamental democratic notions like tolerance, debate and compromise.

But in Yeltsin's political biography we can also see Russian history repeating itself. The struggle for bureaucratic power has its own rules, which run deep in Russian political culture. Only in this context can we see how characters as different as Stalin and Yeltsin have been able to gradually accumulate power through subterranean battles, maneuvering in and out of alliances according to unseen rules.

Over the past two years Yeltsin has waged precisely this kind of bureaucratic trench warfare—building up his strength in the apparatus, placing his appointees into positions of power in Moscow and in the provinces. The weapons of struggle are also the classic bureaucratic ones. When Yeltsin ordered the parliament dissolved, he vindictively cut off the deputies' telephones, electricity and hot water, canceled their access to media time and surrounded the White House with armed

riot police. His opponents had their personal cars, country houses and travel privileges taken away; those who left the building were permitted to retain their Moscow apartments and special medical care and may be eligible for cushy state jobs. The current crackdown is not likely to end any time soon, precisely because traditional Russian bureaucratic politics have triumphed over the fledgling institutions of democracy.

A sign of the times was the arrest, on October 5, of Boris Kagarlitsky, the leader of the democratic socialist Party of Labor and a prominent dissident writer. (See *In These Times*, June 14, 1993.) Kagarlitsky was arrested and beaten in custody after the Moscow city council, of which he is a deputy, was dissolved by order of Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, a Yeltsin ally. "We have to start again to build democracy in this country, from the very beginning, block by block," Kagarlitsky said after his release.

It is clear that Yeltsin decided to do away with the parliament long ago—he made one previous, abortive attempt

toward the end of March—and was only awaiting an appropriate moment and a convenient pretext. After months of gridlock between president and parliament, Yeltsin went on national television September 21 to announce Presidential Decree 1400. At a stroke, Yeltsin rid himself of the parliament, which has shifted over the past two years from being his personal power base to a locus of opposition; gave himself a free hand to rewrite Russia's constitution; and made sure that he would set the terms and the conditions for any new parliamentary elections.

When the parliament—elected under the same constitu-

tion and the same rules as the president—refused to disband, Yeltsin set the stage for a confrontation by ordering armed troops to blockade the White House, many of whose defenders were also heavily armed.

"It is ridiculous to suppose you can play with fire and not get burned," says a Moscow political scientist who now prefers to remain anonymous. "The president's siege of the White House was calculated to produce a moment when there would be violence, a pretext for him to attack in the name of public order."

He received the pretext he needed on October 3, when

some 15,000 pro-parliament demonstrators broke through police lines, shattered the siege of the White House, and swarmed into the adjacent square euphoric with their victory.

Some observers, including Party of Labor theorist Alexander Buzgalin, believe that the entire affair was something of a setup. "It would not have been difficult to stop this demonstration from reaching the White House," he argues. "In fact, the riot police made no effort to do so." Buzgalin suggests that the early ineffectiveness of the riot police was an attempt to lure Rutskoi, a military man at heart, into a foolish armed misadventure.

The riot police may have merely blundered atrociously that day in failing to control what was after all a fairly small demonstration by Moscow standards. But Rutskoi did indeed, in Buzgalin's words, "move to press his advantage"—organizing the demonstrators into two informal militias. One was sent to assault the mayor's office next door; the other to seize Ostankino, the state broadcasting center. At Ostankino serious violence erupted, transforming the political complexion of the standoff.

With blood already shed, Yeltsin was able to convince wavering military commanders to support him in doing what had been previously unthinkable. Western leaders—having already supported Yeltsin's dissolution of the duly elected parliament—found it easy enough to support deadly force, rationalized as an inevitability. As Steven Erlanger explained in a *New York Times* news analysis of October 5, "The

## Fit to print

**T**oo often, America's major media outlets act remarkably like official propaganda organs during important international crises. A good example of this can be found in the *New York Times'* coverage of Russia's constitutional crisis. *Times* reporting has ranged from distortion to outright misstatement of facts—all of which excuse Russian President Boris Yeltsin's unconstitutional dissolution of Russia's parliament and his subsequent crackdown.

On September 22, the first day of reporting on the crisis, the *Times* correspondent Serge Schmemmann described the Russian parliament as a "Communist-dominated legislature" that had been "elected in 1989 ... when the Communist Party still ruled supreme." Schmemmann added, "Rules set by the party assured the election of many Communists and extreme nationalists." That same day, a *Times* news analysis by Steven Erlanger cited approvingly the view that the parliament is "less a parliament in Western terms than a gang of party hacks, more selected than elected."

In fact, Communists make up a minority of the deputies; the majority are centrists, who, while favoring the gradual development of a market economy, disagree with Yeltsin's extreme "shock therapy" policies. Both Schmemmann and Erlanger confused the defunct Soviet legislature—which was elected in 1989, with many deputies directly named by the party—with the current Russian legislature. The latter was elected in 1990, with all constituencies having multi-candidate elections.

Russia's highest court found Yeltsin's decree unconstitutional and upheld parliament's response of deposing President Yeltsin. Yet the *Times'* Schmemmann informed readers of this by stating that "the Constitutional Court—whose chairman, Valery D. Zorkin, has long been hostile to Mr. Yeltsin—acted after what could have only been a few hours deliberation." While criticizing Yeltsin on occasion, Zorkin has also served as a mediator between parliament and the president.

Schmemmann wrote that "the actions by Mr. Yeltsin and by the parliament were legally questionable." He left unexplored the question of how the parliament's actions might have been illegal. In any event, Schmemmann reported that "the Russian constitution is based on the communist one of the Brezhnev era"—implying that readers should not regard the legalities of the situation as very important.

Schmemmann characterized demonstrators supporting the parliament as "die-hard Communists and nationalists." Erlanger went further in an October 5 news analysis, describing Yeltsin's routed foes as a "motley collection of Communists, ultranationalists, fascists, bully boys and anti-Semites who clustered around the parliament's cause." In fact, many politically diverse groups and prominent individuals across Russia have opposed Yeltsin's action, including well-known free market economist and presidential aspirant Grigory Yavlinsky.

Evidently, to the *New York Times*, democracy and legality fade in importance—along with objective reporting—when a supporter of capitalism and willing junior partner of U.S. foreign policy such as Boris Yeltsin "attempts," as Schmemmann put it on October 4, "to break Russia out of its history of authoritarian rule."

—David M. Kotz



West, of course, had no option but to support Mr. Yeltsin, given the alternative of Mr. Rutskoi. And Mr. Yeltsin remains the best hope for democracy and a market economy in Russia."

The *Times* has a curious notion of democracy indeed (see accompanying story). But, as the talk of "markets" suggests, the root of the struggle between Yeltsin and his parliamentary enemies lay in the economic realities of the new Russia. The old *nomenklatura*—Russia's enduring political class—has visibly grown wealthy during two years of economic "shock therapy" (though no one can say exactly how), and are demanding more of the same. The parliamentarians moved away from Yeltsin as his drastic shock therapy bit deep into their social constituencies.

It's hard to estimate how many Russians actually endorse the president's constitutional coup. The recent demonstrations in Moscow have actually been, by Moscow standards, quite small—a September 26 pro-Yeltsin demonstration drew about 10,000; and even the dramatic October 3 march on the White House by his opponents involved only 15,000. In a country of Russia's immense size, such turnouts if anything suggest mass apathy and exhaustion. Three years ago the Democratic Russia movement that Yeltsin headed could bring out a quarter of a million Muscovites to political rallies, and frequently did. But, as Yeltsin knows well, apathy in Russia favors whoever controls the apparatus.

In the final analysis, Yeltsin has abolished parliament not because it blocked his economic reforms—the deputies have had little power to do that these past two years—but largely because he is helpless in the face of Russia's burgeoning social and economic disaster.

Economic reform in Russia has succeeded in creating a class of owner-entrepreneurs, the "new men" for whom Yeltsin and his advisers insist they are clearing the way. But their numbers are hopelessly small, and their economic accomplishments—exporting raw materials, importing luxury consumer goods for their own consumption—are overwhelmingly viewed by Russians as anti-social acts. The few political parties that have arisen to unabashedly champion



the new capitalist cause, such as Konstantin Borovoi's Party of Economic Freedom and Yegor Gaidar's Russian Choice movement, enjoy virtually no popular support.

If the winners are few, the losers are legion. Most Russians have suffered a considerable drop in their living standards over the past two years, and about 20 percent have plunged below the subsistence line. Yeltsin, a populist of considerable talents, brought a lot of these people along on the strength of his hero status as the slayer of communism, and by promising Western-style prosperity at the end of the tunnel. But this rhetoric has begun to wear thin.

So far, no political movement has arisen to articulate the rage and disappointment of those who have lost out, to address the dark side of Russia's new realities.

The consequences of Yeltsin's crackdown will be far-reaching, and brutal. Having thrown in his lot with the bureaucratic-military establishment, Yeltsin will no longer be troubled by any substantive democratic pressures. A certain cosmetic effort may be necessary to calm Western public opinion—but Russia being Russia, and Western public opinion being Western public opinion, even that may fall by the wayside.

"In the best case we shall have phony elections in December," suggests Kagarlitsky, still bruised and swollen from the beating he took after his arrest. "More likely there will be no elections at all."

Fred Weir writes regularly for *In These Times*.

## R U S S I A

# The lost empire



With the economy in collapse and the political system spiraling from deadlock to dictatorship, Russia's nuclear armaments—symbols of a lost superpower status—seem the last remaining icon distinguishing Russia from the Third World. Some Russians wonder if the country will emerge from its current chaos as the international equivalent of “Upper Volta with rockets.”

Russia's new elite seems to think that spurning the Third World in favor of improved relations with the United States and Western Europe will somehow make the disturbing image disappear. In the first two years of a post-Soviet foreign policy, the Soviet Union's long competition with the West for client states in the Third World has been replaced by Russia's attempt to aggressively

isolate itself from the lower rungs of the new world pecking order.

Whatever their other differences, Boris Yeltsin and his (now seemingly vanquished) opponents share the dream of restoring Russia's lost dominance on the world stage. Nowhere in Russia's political spectrum will people disagree with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev's statement that “a place in the ranks of the highly developed nations, the leading representatives of humanity ... belongs to Russia by right.”

Yeltsin's opponents, and some within the government, called for Russia to reassert itself independently of and in confrontation with the West. Yeltsin's victory in the recent struggles—which, as *In These Times* went to press, appeared decisive—strengthens the hand of those who feel that Russia must lean on the West to enter the elite club.

The country's new political masters were raised in the shadow of the global confrontation between East and West—a world in which “aggressive imperialism” faced off against “peace-loving socialism.” And though most among the Russian

political elite have, loudly and publicly, rejected this upbringing, they have not rid themselves of the tendency to divide the world into separate and hostile camps. The Russian foreign policy establishment and mass media have rapidly warmed to the idea, long popular in the West, that East-West conflict has been supplanted by the North-South divide.

The new Moscow prefers to see the North as the natural bearer of progress and civilization, viewing the South as an unruly disturber of the peace. “Here there is no choice, as we are speaking in any case of the formation of a new society,” Kozyrev said in an interview earlier this year. “And will it be stagnant, backward, along the model of the Third World, or will it be a society oriented toward the so-called First World?”

For Kozyrev and the bulk of Russia's new foreign policy-makers the choice is clear—Russia will stand on the “civilized ... side of the barricade.”

This rejection of the Third World stems in part from Russia's ample reservoir of prejudice and hostility. The anti-communist reformers now in power in Russia freely manipulated these sentiments in their attacks against Soviet policies, targeting Cuba, Angola and other recipients of Soviet economic aid as lazy, uncivilized “freeloaders” living off the hard work of the Russian people. “The Hand of Moscow Fed Even Cannibals,” was the headline for the pro-reform *Komsomolskaya Pravda's* report on Soviet lending practices in the Third World.

With the possibilities for economic integration with the First World stifled by the chaos and backwardness of the

*Russia would rather fight the Third World than join it.*

By Ken Gluck and  
Tatiana Vorozheikina  
MOSCOW



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Russian economy, Russians are forced to look to international affairs as the prime arena of a new "equal partnership with the West."

To accomplish this they have quickly imported the West's traditional black list of Third World bogeymen—including "Islamic fundamentalism," drug dealers and international terrorism. "Progressive" forces in the Russian military eagerly await the day when joint U.S.-Russian teams can unite to fight against poorer, less "civilized" and less well-armed opponents.

Four years after the last Russian soldiers left Afghanistan, Russian helicopters are once again plying the ravines and gorges of Central Asia's mountains, chasing down bands of *mujahideen* rebels. During the Soviet Union's 10-year struggle in Afghanistan, the setting was Afghanistan's Hindu Kush. Now the venue for the fighting has moved across the border into the Pamirs of the former Soviet republic of Tajikistan, where opposition rebels, backed by Afghan *mujahideen*, are fighting to topple the Moscow-backed government. Just as before, the rebels claim to be fighting in the name of Islam against a regime propped up by Russian tanks.

The Tajik civil war erupted in 1992, driven by the republic's bitter regional rivalries. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, an anti-communist coalition government dominated by Garm Tajiks and Pamiris from the republic's

east seized power. With the backing of Russian troops and the remnants of the local Communist Party, the coalition government was ousted by Kuliabi Tajiks last December.

Four years after the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan, Russian soldiers are again facing off against the *mujahideen*.

Even by the jaded standards of post-Soviet warfare, the war was distinguished by shocking savagery on both sides. According to official government statistics, which many consider gross underestimates, the brief civil war left over 20,000 dead—the bloodiest of the civil wars that now dot the former Soviet Union.

Russian participation in the conflict went mostly undebated until July, when a Russian post on the Afghan border was overrun by a joint force of Tajik and Afghan fighters, leaving 25 Russian soldiers dead. Soon after the attack, Russia began flying tens of thousands of fresh troops to bolster their presence in the republic. For critics in Moscow, it was the beginning of the same slippery slope of escalation and tragedy that they remember from the Afghan war.

Moscow has been eager to reassure Russians fearful of a repeat of the bitter Afghan experience. A drawn-out military quagmire will be avoided, Deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly Adamishin told *Moscow News*, because "in that war [Afghanistan] we were on opposite sides of the barricade



from the Americans."

Now, he continued, "the Americans and many other countries want to help us resolve this conflict." Rather than a proxy war between the Soviet Union and the West, the fighting is against "Islamic fundamentalists and international terrorism," the common enemies of both Russia and the West. The hundreds of thousands of refugees the war has already produced will undoubtedly be glad to know they are the beneficiaries of a new era of peace and cooperation.

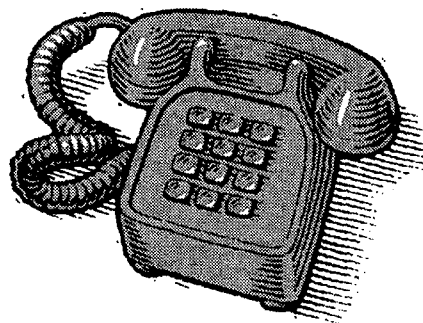
The war in Tajikistan has also become the proving ground for Russia's attempt to construct a sphere of exclusive domination on the ruins of the former Soviet Union. After years of disparaging the Monroe Doctrine, Russians are now inclined to admire it, using it as an analogy for their own plans in the newly independent republics. Of course, Russia has far more justification for such a doctrine than Monroe or his enthusiasts ever did. Only two years ago, the republics were part of the same country.

Even if Russia were intent on withdrawing, it would take years to disentangle the web of military, political and personal ties that bind it to the republics. In spite of this, the relationship grates on those in the republics eager to emphasize their independence from Russia. Since the union's breakup, both Iran and Turkey have openly competed for influence among the newly independent Central Asian states, where both have deep religious and cultural ties. In reasserting its military might in the region, Russia is sending a signal that it will not welcome third parties in the region.

Russia's demonization of the Third World has had disturbing domestic consequences. As in the West, the fears of Islamic fundamentalism are closely tied to a pervasive distrust of any form of the religion. In the mostly Muslim areas within Russia—along the Volga and in the Northern Caucasus—separatist sentiments have risen hand in hand with religious revival. The Northern Caucasus, Russia's poorest region, is increasingly viewed by Russians as the country's own internal Third World, and looked upon with hostility and derision. Many Russian cities have passed laws blocking migration from the Caucasus, and pogroms have broken out in several regions. The people from the Caucasus are blamed for everything from crime to high prices and the failure of the Russian banking system.

According to the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion, more than two-thirds of Russians support the goal of restoring Russia's role on the world stage. But according to Yuri Levada, the director of the center, Russians have made this choice without considering the costs of greatness. "Sooner or later society will have to be presented with a full and reliable balance of the achievements and losses tied to state greatness," Levada argues. "It is necessary to calculate not only the significance of what has been lost, but also the price of the period of world greatness ... that glory bought with blood." ◀

**Ken Gluck** is a regular contributor to *In These Times*. **Tatiana Vorozheikina** is a senior research fellow at the Institute of the World Economy and International Relations in Moscow.



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## R U S S I A

# Reactor redux

*Seven  
years after  
Chernobyl,  
Russia is  
returning to  
nuclear power.*

By Zhores A.  
Medvedev

In a few years' time, huge Soviet nuclear missile submarines with nuclear engines and titanium hulls—their intercontinental ballistic missiles having been removed—will ply the Russian Arctic coast, transporting goods under the ice throughout the year.

This is just one of the ways in which nuclear energy has unexpectedly become popular again in Russia. The level of nuclear energy production has clearly begun to rise in the last few months. In April, on the eve

series of such plants that began construction 10 years ago, will be completed.

The most unexpected decision in the Russian nuclear energy program, however, is the adoption of a proposal to harness the reactors of nuclear submarines, cruisers and nuclear icebreakers for civilian purposes. This program would turn the subs into floating or underwater power stations for regions of the Arctic coast, Siberia and the Far East, where delivery of fuel is very expensive because of geographic isolation and poor roads.

Russia has inherited more than 100 reactors from the Soviet Navy. They vary in capacity from 3 to 70 megawatts of electricity, but they all have a relatively high degree of reliability and safety. Some of them are still operating on ships and submarines, but several dozen new-generation reactors were designed and built for submarines and ships that the Russian fleet no longer needs. These are the reactors that would be used as small floating or underwater nuclear

of the seventh anniversary of the Chernobyl accident, a new reactor went on line at the Balakovskaya nuclear power plant in the Saratov region. With the addition of the reactor's 1 million kilowatts of electricity, nuclear power now accounts for 10-13 percent of electricity production in Russia. Production of electricity at gas-, fuel oil- and coal-fired power stations has continued to fall.

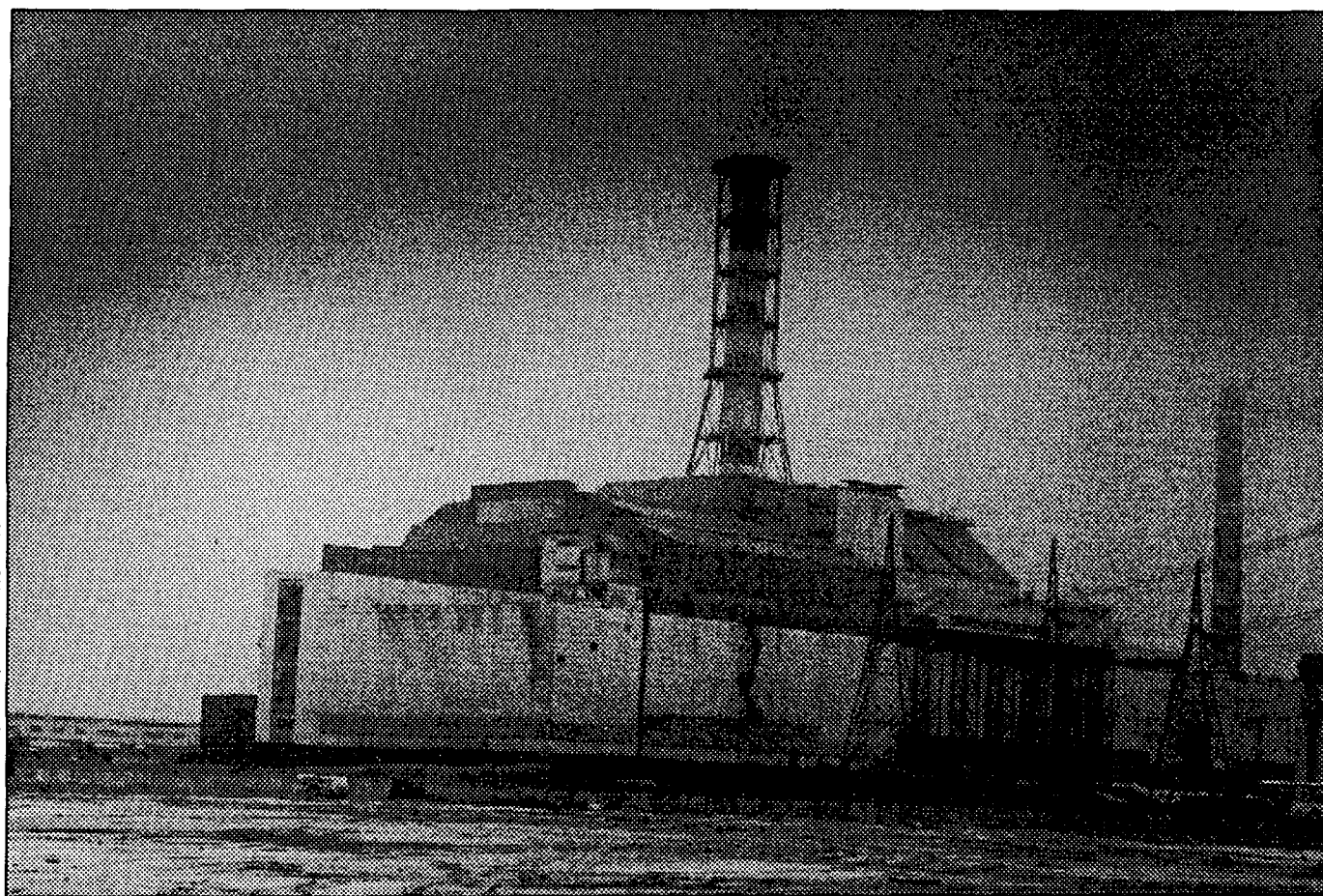
Public protests after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster led to a moratorium on construction of nuclear plants. But work has now been resumed. In 1994, a third VVER-1000 pressurized water reactor will come into operation at the Kalinin nuclear power plant, primarily to produce electricity for Moscow. Also next year, the fifth reactor block of the Kursk plant—an RBMK-1000 Chernobyl-type reactor—will be put into operation. And a nuclear power plant to provide central heating for Voronezh, the first of a

*Zhores A. Medvedev is a Russian scientist who has worked at the National Institute for Medical Research in London since he was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1973. Medvedev is the author of several scientific books, and co-author, with his brother Roy A. Medvedev, a distinguished Soviet historian, of Khrushchev: the Years in Power. In 1979, Zhores published The Nuclear Disaster in the Urals, a book that decisively proved the occurrence in 1957 of "the biggest nuclear tragedy in peacetime that the world has known." This nuclear accident contaminated more than a thousand square kilometers and caused the death of hundreds of people. An extensive part of the industrially developed southern Urals became uninhabitable and has remained so for decades.*

*Soviet authorities suppressed all information about the disaster; likewise, the CIA and the U.K. Atomic Energy Authority, both of which had vested interests in keeping the public ignorant of the dangers of nuclear power. Unlike the accident at Chernobyl, which occurred several years after Medvedev's book was published—and which caused less damage than the 1957 explosion—the Urals disaster escaped world notice until Medvedev's "scientific detective work" revealed the truth.*

*In the following article, Medvedev once again brings us news of nuclear developments in Russia, this time about the peaceful use of nuclear power and the importance of this industry to the new Russian Republic. Many people will be appalled by these developments; others will see them as unavoidable. Medvedev here simply lays the facts before us.*





power plants to be deployed along the Arctic coast or in the lower reaches of Siberian rivers.

Program planners also hope that large maritime reactors can be installed underground. One such project has already been commissioned by the far eastern Primorsky region to provide central heating for Khabarovsk.

Public and media outcry over such plans has been minimal. Apparently, the Russian people's fear of nuclear disaster—the "Chernobyl Syndrome" that led to a moratorium on all nuclear construction in 1989—has been displaced by concern over economic "shock therapy" and political struggles.

Indeed, Russian economic and energy planners face a lot of hard choices. Having lost the western, southern and southeastern territories of its empire when the Soviet Union disintegrated, Russia will depend primarily on the exploitation of the resources of the Arctic, Siberia and the Far East. But these resources are located beneath the permafrost, and the vast distances and the severe climate make it impossible to construct modern roads and airports. Goods are transported by helicopter and along the rivers in summer.

Some time ago, scientists began to design small reactors to provide both heat and electricity for the industrial and mining villages in these areas. The first—and so far, the only—nuclear station of this kind has been operating successfully for 10 years in the mining village of Bilibino in the Magadan region on the border of the Chukotsky peninsula.

Four reactors, each with 12-megawatt capacity for heat energy, are in operation. Calculations done at a time when the price of Russian oil was still very low demonstrate that one kilowatt of energy produced by fuel oil in this region would cost 10 times more than the energy produced by these nuclear reactors.

But plans to use Navy reactors for civilian use are not limited to remote areas. A few months ago, I visited the Institute of Radium in St. Petersburg, the oldest nuclear institute in Russia. While I was there, experts were discussing the possibility of locating reactors from military ships within the city, housing them in one of the deep-underground tunnels originally excavated for St. Petersburg's metro.

Does Russia need such reactors? After all, the Russian Federation produced as much electric energy per person (7,100 kilowatts) in 1988 as Germany, and more than France (6,660 kilowatts). But these Western European countries have mild climates. And when one compares Russian per capita electric energy usage with northern countries like Canada, Sweden, Norway and Finland, Russia turns out to be two or three times less developed than they are. Norway, the world's leader in per capita use of electric energy (25,083 kilowatts), is a mountainous country with many rivers. It obtains 99 percent of its electricity from hydroelectric stations. Finland, on the other hand, with few rivers and



mountains, produces 35 percent of its energy (13,118 kilowatts per person per year) at two nuclear plants.

The fall in production of oil, coal and even gas in Russia between 1990 and 1993, combined with Russia's plentiful supply of enriched uranium, led to the renewed emphasis on nuclear energy. About 45 percent of the world's deposits of uranium are located in the former Soviet Union. The amount of enriched uranium produced over a period of almost 20 years was far more than the USSR needed. And while part of it was exported, there is still enough enriched uranium in Russia to run all of the country's nuclear power plants for 10 years. Moreover, the highly enriched weapons-grade isotope 235 that is being extracted from the warheads destined for destruction is being added to the supply.

Furthermore, plutonium recovered from the Soviet arsenal can be used either as fuel in fast-breeder reactors or in safer reactors specially designed to "burn" military plutonium. Officials have resumed construction of a fast-breeder BN-800 reactor in Beloyarsk in the Sverdlovsk region, and a similar reactor is being built at the Yuzhno-Uralskaya nuclear power plant in the Cheliabinsk region.

But Russia's renewed emphasis on nuclear power is based on employment considerations as well. The post-Chernobyl moratorium on building new nuclear plants brought to a halt a program that was designed to double the production of nuclear energy by the year 2000. As a result, the Soviet nuclear industry, which aimed to put six to eight new power reactors into operation each year, became under-exploited. The scientific and experimental institutes connected to the nuclear industry also lost their commissions, and many of them turned to designing a new generation of safer reactors and to modernizing and improving the safeguards of existing reactors.

In addition, when the nuclear program came to a halt in 1989 tens of thousands of qualified building workers, technicians and engineers effectively became unemployed, although they continued to draw their salaries. During the past two years, this army of unemployed Russians was joined by thousands of workers, engineers and scientists who had previously worked on building and servicing military reactors that produced plutonium. This latter group is out of work because two-thirds of the former Soviet Union's 27,000 nuclear warheads are to be destroyed—and plutonium can now be obtained from the dismantled nuclear warheads rather than by the complex and radiologically "dirty" work of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel.

Thus, the government was faced with a stark choice: either it had to dismiss tens of thousands of people from the civilian and military nuclear industries—without being able to offer them any alternative source of employment—or it had to revive various programs involving construction of nuclear power plants. Moreover, unemployment would not be limited to the nuclear industries themselves. Associated industries would be affected—such as those that produce the turbines, steam generators, durable pipes, alloys, heavy concrete and hundreds of other materials and components

that are used in the nuclear industries.

And if the Russian people seem more concerned about jobs than about another Chernobyl, it has much to do with the severity of the Chernobyl disaster itself. Paradoxically, Chernobyl made other nuclear accidents look insignificant. There have, in fact, been four serious accidents in Russia and Ukraine since Chernobyl.

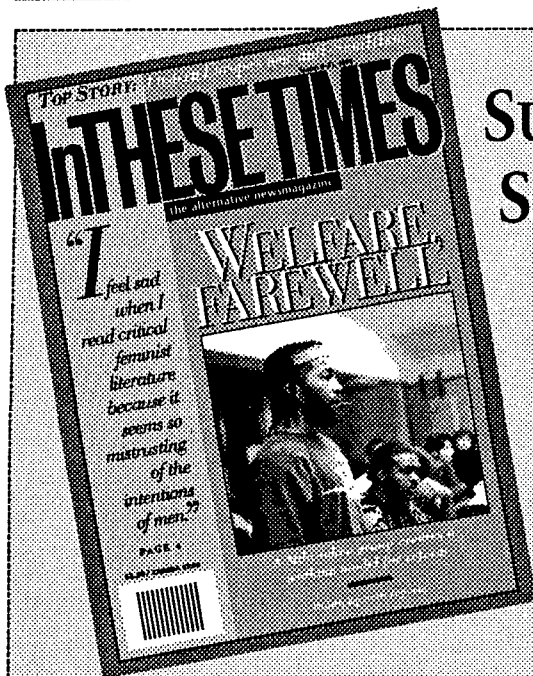
The first was a fire in the turbine hall of the second block at Chernobyl on Oct. 11, 1991, which led to the permanent closure of the block. The second accident was caused by a defective valve in the cooling system of the third RBMK-1000 reactor at the Leningrad nuclear plant on March 24, 1992, causing the meltdown of one of the channels and the emission of radioactive products on the site of the plant. All nine RBMK-100 reactors in the Russian Federation were shut down temporarily after the Leningrad accident so that their water-cooled valves could be checked and changed.

The third accident was an explosion of a container of radioactive liquid nuclear waste at a factory for reprocessing spent nuclear fuel in the secret Tomsk-7 center on April 7, 1993. As a result of the explosion, a sparsely populated 200-square-kilometer area to the northeast of the factory was contaminated with radioactivity. A month later, there was a hydrogen explosion and a fire in the machine hall of the Zaporozhskaya nuclear power plant. This was the only one of the four accidents in which there were fatalities, but by any measure all of them were very serious. Yet they seemed small-time in comparison with Chernobyl, and so did not cause a great stir in the former Soviet Union.

In Russia, the main fear of accidents has shifted from nuclear reactors to the dismantling of atomic and thermonuclear warheads and bombs. This work has to be done, but dismantling thermonuclear bombs is a great deal more complex and dangerous than assembling them. In the years since the warheads were manufactured, changes unique to each warhead may have occurred in their complex conventional, atomic and thermonuclear charges.

Russia is not alone in its nuclear problems. Without the Soviet Union's integrated energy system, almost all the former republics, apart from Russia and Azerbaijan, face acute shortages of oil, gas and coal. Armenia has applied to Russia and to the international community to reconstruct and put into operation the nuclear plant near Yerevan that was shut down after the Armenian earthquake in 1988. Belarus, the republic most seriously affected by the Chernobyl accident, has proposed U.S. construction of a nuclear plant. (The Belarusian leaders, who came to power in 1990 on a wave of propaganda against nuclear power, hope that American reactors will be less dangerous, from a political as well as technical point of view.)

But because neither Armenia nor Belarus can pay for Western projects, they may turn to Russia. Nuclear energy, one of the main causes of the rise of nationalism and separatism (at least in Ukraine and Belarus) after the Chernobyl accident, may thus become a major impetus toward a new economic and political union. ◀



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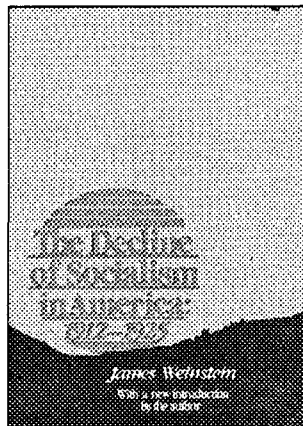
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**E N V I R O N M E N T**

# Chlorine crisis

*Evidence  
increasingly  
shows that  
chlorine  
compounds  
pose human  
health risks.  
But Clinton  
has been  
slow to act.*

By David Moberg

**E**very year 27,000 neighborhood dry-cleaning establishments release into the air about 100,000 tons of the volatile chemical that cleans the nation's wool suits, silk blouses and polyester pants. The chemical is perchloroethylene, better known as "perc," a chlorinated hydrocarbon known to cause cancer. Despite recent industry efforts to control emissions, perc pollution from those ma-and-pa operations adds up to twice the hazardous air pollution from the auto and metalworking industries combined.

There is, however, an alternative to this environmental and public-health problem. It is possible to clean virtually all "dry clean only" clothes with skilled labor using water, scrubbing, tumbling, steam and soap or relatively non-toxic spotting agents.

These "multi-process wet cleaning" techniques also

are far better for clothes as well as being environmentally benign, argues Richard Simon, a debonair Englishman who carried on his grandfather and father's non-chemical cleaning trade while the rest of the industry turned to chemicals. Dry cleaning wool is like using gasoline to degrease one's hair, he says. After failing to persuade the U.S. dry-cleaning industry that it should change techniques, Simon is now launching Eco-clean, a projected franchise "wet cleaning" system.

Early this month, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reported that its comparative test of wet and dry cleaning showed that both performed reasonably well, with consumers preferring the results of wet cleaning. The cost of cleaning a batch of clothes was about the same for wet and dry cleaning. Wet cleaning uses more labor, but involves less capital investment and none of the costs associated with using and disposing of perc. Consequently, a new, exclusively "wet" cleaning service would produce roughly twice the return on investment as a dry cleaner. Even if an establishment were half wet, half dry, its profitability could still match or beat an exclusively dry operation.

The social and health benefits of reduced pollution and exposure of customers and neighbors to perc make the potential payoff of wet cleaning even greater. Yet a changeover won't be automatic. Cleaners must learn new skills, and conversion costs could be a barrier, although tighter perc regulations would provide new incentives to change.

Conversion to wet cleaning will also face resistance from chemical companies and equipment makers, which now set the direction of the industry. But Greenpeace, the international environmental organization, and the Chicago-based Center for Neighborhood Technology hope to turn the industry around. They plan to bolster Eco-clean's entrepreneurial example with activism—and also hope for federal encouragement.

Eliminating perc and transforming the \$5.3 billion dry-cleaning business is also a demonstration project for a grander Greenpeace goal: eliminating the use of chlorine and chlorinated hydrocarbons. These chlorinated hydrocarbons, or "organochlorines," are rare in nature. But since World War II, the petrochemical industry has created more than 11,000 organochlorine compounds—from pesticides like DDT to plastics like polyvinyl chloride, known as PVC or vinyl. Chlorine compounds are also used in industrial processes, from bleaching paper to manufacturing drugs.

Some organochlorines, such as ozone-destroying chlorofluorocarbons or carcinogenic PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), have already been banned. Yet even if a particular organochlorine is benign, dozens of unintended by-products result from its production, use and disposal. These by-products include such highly toxic substances as dioxin. Moreover, many of the most toxic organochlorines are long-lived and accumulate in more concentrated form at higher



levels of the food chain.

A growing body of scientific evidence documents the health risks posed to humans by chlorinated hydrocarbons. There's increased evidence linking organochlorines to the epidemic of breast cancer and of the carcinogenic effects of dioxin. For example, a new study of the population around Seveso, Italy—which was exposed to dioxin in a 1976 explosion of a herbicide factory—reveals excessive cancers. With this and other recent studies, “the weight of evidence is becoming overwhelming” that dioxin causes human cancers, says Linda Birnbaum, the EPA's coordinator of a major federal reassessment of dioxin's dangers.

More seriously, there is increasing evidence that dioxin and many other organochlorines wreak their worst damage on the reproductive and endocrine systems. Embryos, infants and children are most vulnerable—suffering a wide range of developmental disorders. A recent study, for example, found abnormal brain size in children born to mothers from Times Beach, Mo., a town built on a dioxin-contaminated site.

So far, the evidence gathered by the EPA dioxin reassessment has confirmed that there are good reasons for alarm. The preliminary report shows that there's no threshold of safe exposure to dioxin (and many related organochlorines). Even a single molecule at the right moment in embryonic development can cause lasting damage. Moreover, the background level of dioxin already in the bodies of the average American—not just chemical workers or people living downwind of waste incinerators—is sufficient to cause health problems, as some EPA officials now acknowledge.

Such evidence led the International Joint Commission (IJC)—a U.S.-Canadian intergovernmental body overseeing the Great Lakes—to conclude in 1991 that only a ban on the use of chlorine in industry could end the threat from persistent toxic chemicals. The politically conservative IJC commissioners determined that regulation of emissions wouldn't work, and that individual reviews of each chemical would be unrealistic and ineffective.

Although industry has tried to fight the recommended chlorine phase-out, environmentalists—led by Greenpeace and many Great Lakes organizations—will gather at the biennial IJC meeting October 21-24 to demand that the commission begin developing a plan for transition to a chlorine-free economy.

“We're talking about a fundamental transformation of major sectors of industrial society,” says Jack Weinberg, chlorine campaigner for Greenpeace International. “Chlorine is central to synthetic chemistry, and eliminating it will require real adjustment. People may have resisted the truth, but environmental imperatives dictate that we must rethink



how various sectors of society are organized. The next big phase of industrial development will involve executing society-wide U-turns in order to protect the environment and society. It's important that it's not just industry involved in this discussion.”

Environmental organizations have supported a request by the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union to address the IJC, and Greenpeace has endorsed a “Superfund for Workers” to compensate and retrain workers displaced by a chlorine phase-out.

The Chlorine Institute and the Chemical Manufacturers Association, meanwhile, have argued that a ban would be “unscientific” and extremely costly. The real issue, however, is not the scientific research itself, but what model the country should use for public policy-making on scientific issues. Environmentalists argue that the long-term prevention of harm is more important than immediate costs.

They point to IJC research showing that the nation spends an estimated \$75 billion a year or more for health care costs attributable to toxic substances, and \$90 billion a year on pollution control. Those numbers counterbalance the findings of a private consulting firm retained by the Chlorine Institute. The consulting firm estimated that it would cost U.S. consumers \$91 billion a year to eliminate chlorine. The firm also acknowledged that phasing out 95 percent of chlorine would cost only about \$20 billion a year. And the industry-backed study's estimates also exaggerated the costs and underestimated—or completely ignored—the potential of benign alternatives, which include wet cleaning and organic agriculture.

Yet for all its environmental pretensions, the Clinton

administration remains trapped by a public policy model that stresses pollution control rather than pollution prevention.

The White House has repeatedly caved in to corporate demands. For example, after paper-industry lobbying, the administration reduced standards for the government purchase of recycled paper. Those standards were restored following a public uproar, but plans to encourage the purchase of chlorine-free paper were dropped. Clinton's bad environmental policy also is bad industrial policy. It fails to encourage the U.S. industry to modernize and remain competitive at a time when much of the world paper industry is already abandoning chlorine, under government and consumer pressure.

Clinton has also caved in on incinerators of garbage and hazardous waste, both of which emit many dangerous organochlorines. Despite financial crises and a glut of capacity in the incinerator industry (which have led to recent cancellation of three planned hazardous waste incinerators), Clinton approved operation of the huge incinerator owned by Waste Technologies Industries in East Liverpool, Ohio, even though it failed preliminary tests. (See *In These Times*, May 3, 1993.) Afterward, EPA Administrator Carol Browner issued a weak, loophole-ridden moratorium on incinerators. In addition, Browner took some small steps to tighten controls on cement kilns and industrial boilers—which burn, under relatively lax controls, 90 percent of liquid hazardous wastes.

While announcing new restrictions on pesticides (most of which are organochlorines), Browner also recommended

abandoning the Delaney clause, which prohibits processed foods from containing any trace of chemicals that cause cancer in laboratory animals. Her action is contrary to the precautionary, preventive approach that environmentalists want extended to fresh foods. Instead, her policy favors deeply flawed, easily manipulated calculations of potential cancer risk—while ignoring the reproductive and developmental dangers of pesticides.

The EPA should take seriously its own research—from the dry cleaning study to the dioxin reassessment—as well as the conclusions of the IJC. It's time for a carefully planned phase-out of chlorine and for the encouragement of environmentally sound alternatives. Rep. Bill Richardson (D-NM) has proposed two bills that would move in the right direction. One would phase out all chlorine products in the pulp and paper industry within five years; the other would greatly restrict new waste incinerators.

The Clinton administration, however, will not easily embrace this new vision of pollution prevention. Both Bill and Hillary Clinton have long personal and financial ties to corporate organochlorine polluters, from incinerator investors to paper companies. And Browner's deputy, Robert Sussman, was formerly an attorney for the Chemical Manufacturers Association.

Nonetheless, as the Clintons sell their health plan, they might want to remember that their quest to reduce health costs and to bolster preventive medicine could start with a phase-out of chlorine. ▲

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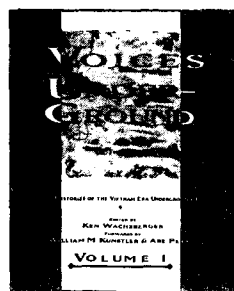
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## EDUCATION

# Choice cuts

By Barbara Miner

**“C**hoice” has become the most controversial issue in education today. This fall, the debate can be summed up in one word: California.

A statewide referendum this November 2 will decide the fate of a constitutional amendment intended to give California parents state-funded vouchers to send their children to private schools, including religious schools.

The repercussions of the vote will extend far beyond California's borders. California has traditionally been viewed as a bellwether in education trends. The voucher referendum is thus being closely watched by teachers, school boards, parent activists and politicians across the country.

Even voucher supporters acknowledge they face an uphill battle, but they have made it clear that this is just a beginning—the first of many expected defeats on their hoped-for road to victory. “There is a tremendous momentum around the country behind this movement,” explains Quentin Quade, head of the conservative Virgil C. Blum Center for Parental Freedom in Education, based in Milwaukee. “It’s just a question of time before the dam breaks.”

Supporters of vouchers couch their arguments in the emotionally appealing language of “choice.” But their rhetoric masks a sharp attack on the

very concept of public education.

There are, undeniably, serious problems with public education, in particular in urban schools shackled by dwindling budgets and escalating social problems. (See story on page 34.) Thus it is understandable that some might turn to vouchers as a viable solution. But critics of vouchers argue that “choice” would only exacerbate the crisis in our schools, especially the problem of funding and of providing equal educational opportunities for all.

Choice has different meanings for different people. Within education, it has become the watchword of conservative forces and has come to be associated with a relentless, well-financed effort to replace our public school system with a marketplace approach to education—even though those same marketplace approaches have created glaring inequalities in

***Publicly funded  
vouchers threaten  
to destroy  
California's  
public school  
system.***

areas such as housing, health care, employment and wages.

Under the California proposal—Proposition 174—students would be given a voucher worth half of the average spending per public school pupil, or roughly \$2,600 per voucher. These vouchers could then be used to attend any private or religious school. Many critics contend the voucher is little more than a subsidy to help middle-class parents pay for private schools, since the average tuition for private schools in California is \$7,000 a year.

Just about any school that can recruit 25 or more children is eligible to receive vouchers. The private schools would not be required to hire certified teachers, nor would they be required to educate children with special needs. Further, the private schools would be able to discriminate against potential students on the basis of religion, gender, family income, IQ test scores or physical disabilities. One of the few restrictions is that a school may not discriminate—or teach “hatred” of any person—on the basis of race, ethnicity, color or national origin.

The voucher funds would come out of money currently set aside for the funding of public schools. (Under a 1988 measure, California has a “minimum funding guarantee” for public schools.)

There are currently about 550,000 private school students in California. Even if no new children enter private schools, money immediately would be siphoned off from public education to help pay for many of those attending private schools. Voucher opponents estimate that if the referendum passes, public schools instantly would lose about \$2.6 billion, or 10 percent of their funding. Under the referendum, private school students would not only receive the \$2,600 voucher but an additional \$2,600 would be taken from the state's minimum funding guarantee and put into the state's general funds.



Due to the specific complexities of California's system of funding schools, the fiscal nightmare would get even worse as public school students transferred to private schools. If 1 million students were to leave the public schools, there would be a 20 percent drop in current public school enrollment. Yet, according to the National Education Association, those public schools would have their funding cut by about 50 percent.

Such a drop in funding would devastate a public school system already reeling from budget cuts that have led to increased class sizes, shortages of textbooks and supplies, and teacher layoffs and pay cuts. In fact, one of the referendum's key goals seems to be the defunding of public education.

Referendum supporters themselves have promoted the financial benefits of the initiative. "With 1.8 million new students expected to enter the system over the next eight years, Proposition 174 will be as necessary fiscally as it is educationally," according to a fact sheet from the pro-voucher group Yes on 174.

If voters approve the referendum, California would be the first state in the history of this country to institute a statewide school voucher program. The only existing private school voucher choice plan was established in 1990 in Milwaukee, under which roughly 1,000 low-income students are eligible to receive approximately \$2,700 apiece in state funds to attend private, non-sectarian schools.

The first efforts to institute school choice were related to the work of conservative economist Milton Friedman in the '50s. And the first choice program in the country provided white students in Virginia public funds to attend private academies in the late '50s and early '60s in order to avoid attending public schools with African-Americans following court-ordered desegregation.

In part because of its association with segregationist policies, the concept of educational choice fell into disfavor. In recent years, however, it has made a stunning comeback. Some 37 states

considered choice legislation in 1992, up from only a handful a few years earlier, according to figures from the Department of Education. Proposals included both private voucher and public school choice plans.

The growing support for school choice naturally follows from Reagan-era ideology. That era was defined by a flight from public responsibility for social problems, whether poverty, jobs or homelessness, and a reliance on private enterprise and the marketplace to try to solve such social ills. The push for school vouchers brings this philosophy to the crisis facing public schools.

The question must be asked: are vouchers, under the guise of freedom of choice, being used to justify abandonment of public school systems serving students of color and low-income students? Ultimately, it is such students who will suffer most from such "freedom of choice," because middle-class parents will be able to supplement the vouchers with their own money and thus would have a broader range of choices of schools.

Unlike health care, housing or jobs, public education has historically been viewed in this country as a public responsibility. Equal access to education, while often denied in practice, has traditionally been espoused as an ideal necessary to ensure a well-educated, responsible citizenry.

The concept of publicly funded vouchers for private schools essentially rejects that approach. Education, rather than a public institution accountable to and serving the needs of society at large, becomes the individual concern of individual parents. Equal access for all is rejected in favor of the best access that money can buy; if some parents have more money than others to buy a better education for their children, then so be it.

The vote in California, therefore, is far more than a statewide referendum on whether parents want more choices for their children. Fundamentally, it is a major battle in a protracted war over the extent to which education in this country will survive as a public institution and responsibility. ◀

Barbara Milner is managing editor of *Rethinking Schools*, an education newspaper based in Milwaukee, Wis., and co-editor of *False Choices: Why School Vouchers Threaten Our Children's Future*.

This article is part of an ongoing series on education edited by Alex Molnar, a professor of education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The series, "Notes from the Back of the Class," covers a wide range of education-related issues. Contributions from readers are welcome. Manuscripts of no more than 1,000 words should be sent to Alex Molnar, c/o In These Times, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647.



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# I N T H E A R T S

## Making the connections

O

*In Short Cuts, Robert Altman links the diverse lives of a city of strangers.*

By Pat Dowell

ne of the more curious by-products of Hollywood's current artistic slump—you know, the one that seems to have lasted a lifetime—is that whenever an ambitious or complicated movie comes along, it gets hyped to death. Critics rush to praise it with a bottom-line mentality, neglecting nuanced evaluation.

Take Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*, for instance. Few other American directors would have the desire or the patience to make a three-hour movie that weaves nearly two dozen major characters into nine stories. The tales form a (whites only) tapestry of contemporary American life on the edges of a big city, in this case, the ideologically loaded locale of Los Angeles.

*Short Cuts* is a good movie, sometimes great. But it's not the Second Coming. Second helping would be

more like it: The structure certainly recalls the kaleidoscopic storytelling style of the director's 1975 gem, *Nashville*, and such lesser Altman efforts as *H.E.A.L.T.H.* and *A Wedding*.

If *Nashville*'s central observation was the numbness closing in on America in the '70s (remember the final singalong after an assassination attempt, "It Don't Worry Me"), *Short Cuts* is assembled out of the fragmentation of America's everyday life. In the film's opening sequence, a fleet of helicopters spraying for medflies provides Altman with a vehicle for introducing the *Short Cuts* cast. As the choppers cross back and forth over L.A., they pass over the heads of all the 22 major characters. Not only do these people get doused with the same pesticide, they ride the same freeways, shop at the same spots and watch the same television shows. Yet their contact with each other rarely proceeds beyond an occasional glancing blow.

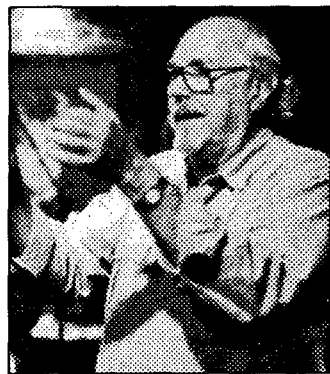
These little encounters are at the center of stories dazzlingly constructed by Altman and frequent co-scenarist Frank Barhydt out of

situations and characters from nine Raymond Carver short stories and a poem. Altman is clearly at home with Carver's minimalist narrative tactics. But Carver's penchant for deadpan moralism translates less successfully to the screen, where it sometimes looks more like a life lesson painted in capital letters.

The stories are connected elegantly. Two couples sitting next to each other at a cello concert rashly make a dinner date. One of the four is a doctor who treats a little boy knocked down by a car, which was driven by a waitress who will never know the damage she's done. The little boy is the son of an earnest television commentator who tries to bring a bit of sanity and sunshine to his viewers.

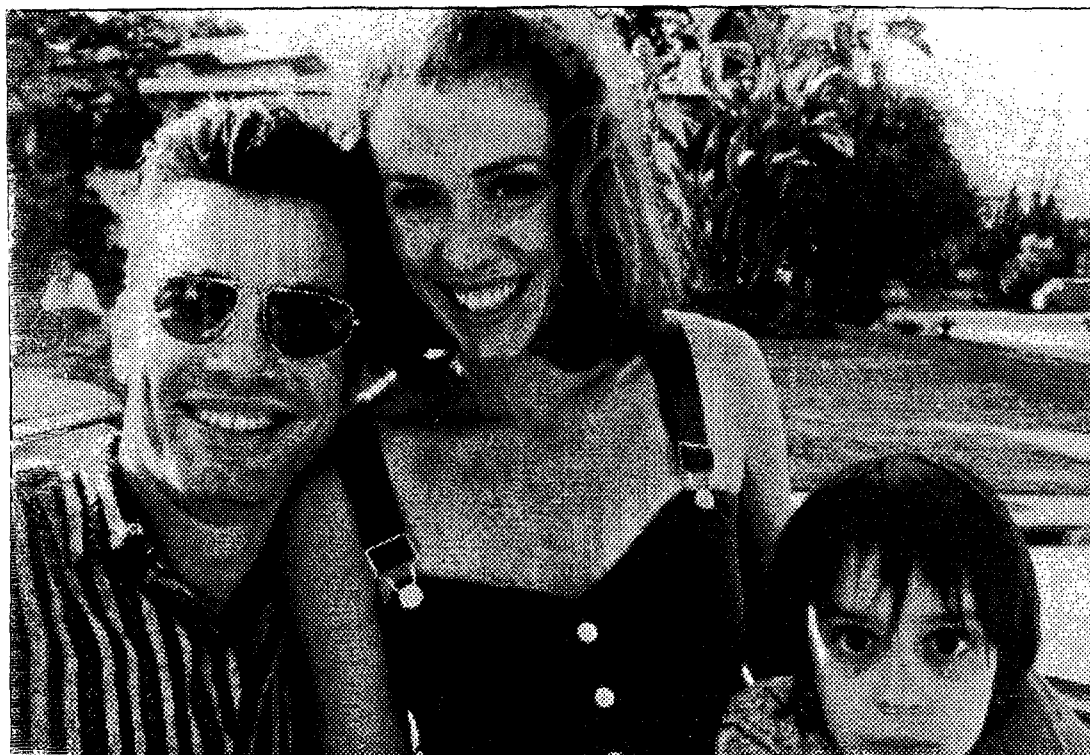
The commentator, meanwhile, lives next door to the cellist from the concert, who exists on the nervous edge of suicide. Her mother sings at a jazz club visited by other characters in the story, one of whom services the commentator's swimming pool. The pool man chafes over his wife's livelihood, phone sex, delivered with squealing infant in hand.

And so it goes through more stories, each life bumping into the next. The particulars of each character's grief, joy and anxiety are all but unknown to the film's



**Short Cuts**  
Directed by Robert Altman

© PHOTOS 1993 FINE LINE FEATURES/JOYCE RUDOLPH



other characters—but painfully clear to the audience. In this way, Altman illuminates the lives of those mysterious faces we see each day on the subway, in line for a sandwich, across a street or a desk, anonymous faces nodded to for years.

It's tempting to call this a sprawling film, but in fact the progress of the different narratives is always under assured control. The same cannot be said for their meanings and the performances. Some stories command attention, like the small car accident that slides into life-shattering catastrophe for the TV commentator and his sheltered wife (Bruce Davison and Andie MacDowell). But some seem forced—most notably the vignette in which Peter Gallagher offers ham-handed comic relief as one of the helicopter pilots, taking revenge with a chainsaw on the household items of the wife who's divorcing him.

The greatest irritant, however, is jazz singer Annie Ross, playing a jazz singer who belts out brave, torchy anthems to herself as a survivor, while remaining aloof from her fragile daughter, the concert cellist (Lori Singer). Ross overdoes it, and Altman, "a longtime friend," according to the press kit, lets her, even abets her. He ends her tragic story of self-absorption with a laughably melodramatic shot. There she is, in sequins and runny mascara, tearful and wailing over her most recent loss. Finally, we are asked to believe, she has been touched to the quick.

Chalk the misguided Ross up to Altman's fabled laissez-

Peter Gallagher, Frances  
McDormand and Jerrett  
Lennon in a scene  
from *Short Cuts*.

who has lately been showing an unfortunate tendency to rant and rave. (See last month's HBO AIDS saga, *And the Band Played On*.) As a doctor who suspects his painter wife (Julianne Moore) of adultery, Modine performs his big accusatory scene at the top of his voice. Few viewers may notice his shortcomings, however, because Moore plays the scene clad only in a waist-length blouse.

Interviewers make much of Altman's avowal that he will not exhibit female nudity without also showing male nudity. One of his associates has even gone so far as to claim he gives them equal time, but Moore's display is hardly matched by Huey Lewis, as a fisherman, whipping it out to pee in a mountain river, where he finds a dead body. Even the corpse gets more full-frontal time.

But more important than the flesh tally is the scorecard of vivid, breathing female characters in the movie. Most of them are struggling with difficult men. Lily Tomlin's pliant coffee-shop waitress is married to a doting alcoholic (Tom Waits, gloriously tender). Madeleine Stowe is startling, almost feral, as a woman who knows exactly what she married in Tim Robbins, who is weirdly perfect as a preening, philandering liar on a Los Angeles Police Department motorcycle. He proves that fascism begins at home.

As with *Nashville*, *Short Cuts* ends with an act of unifying violence—in this case, an earthquake that engulfs all the characters to a greater or lesser degree, and even provides cover for some bloody tracks. It's a bit much to make Mother Nature shake and bake your fictional creations to give a sense of closure. It's really the weakest part of *Short Cuts*—a cinematic short cut by a guy who usually goes the extra mile.



# I N P R I N T

## News from nowhere

By Kent Miller

Equipped with nothing more than a notebook, a sense of outrage and the self-assuredness of an autodidact, James Kunstler prowls the streets of his hometown of Saratoga Springs in upstate New York. A Holiday Inn sign sits on a useless strip of grass: a "noplac." Gimcrack corporate outlets sit in seas of unused parking places: noplaces. A Ramada Inn honors a downtown sidewalk with "a series of delightful laundry ventilation grilles": the sidewalk is another noplac.

Highways have devastated nearby Schuylerville, a town that grew strong on canal and train traffic. Everywhere Kunstler sees sidewalks where no one would want to walk, yards where no child would want to play, business districts where no worker wants to linger after hours.

The ironies abound in *The Geography of Nowhere*, Kunstler's cheerfully scabrous introduction—part history, part polemic—to the hell Americans have wrought on their land. Nostalgic contrivances like Woodstock, Vt., cater to "week-ending corporate warriors," who spend their working lives assiduously obliterating real communities. And when Kunstler begins asking people what they like about Henry Ford's artificially bucolic Greenfield Village, about rural landscapes and even Disney World, the correct answer, "no cars," escapes them all—though most have crawled through miles of traffic to get where they are. Proof positive that the manufacture of consent is not limited to foreign policy.

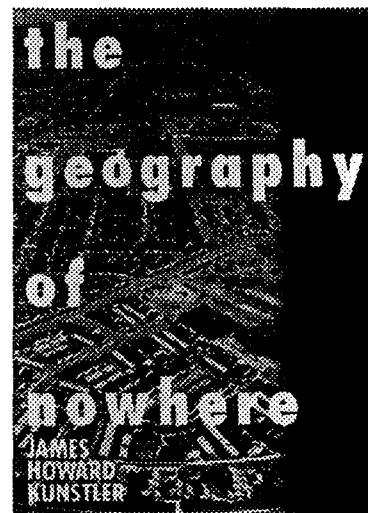
The blasted inner cities, the null suburbs, the hideous shopping malls, the narcoleptic resorts: all result, Kunstler argues, from the all-American conception of land as a commodity for personal gain. William Penn's utopian dream of Philadelphia as a city of houses nestled among orchards was quickly aborted by merchants, who threw up more prof-

itable row houses. The early republic imposed a grid on its vast land holdings with no thought as to how all those little squares would relate to each other. In the end, of course, they did not.

The American dream of home ownership would have been impossible, Kunstler points out, without the development of the simple "balloon-frame" house, a wonder of folk engineering built with mass-produced metal nails and two-by-fours. But the imperative of home ownership would itself be unnecessary were it not for overproduction, the crisis wrought by capital on itself. The boundless boosters of the real estate industry found ready accomplices in the New Dealers, eager to placate an obstreperous citizenry with visions of a consumerist idyll. The retreat to suburbia was driven by mortgage guarantees from the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Administration, the notorious mortgage interest deduction, and gigantic federal highway expenditures. This was an industrial policy for whites only, though, for most of the suburban developers would not lend to blacks.

Anyone who has ever sat through a numbing parade of irate citizens at a planning commission meeting knows that American land policy is driven by one and only one principle: maintaining property values. How else to explain the rococo tissue of regulation and procedure that makes Ming Dynasty court protocol look Spartan in comparison? Setbacks, height limitations and, most importantly, building densities are all explicated in mind-numbing detail in order to straitjacket development. The guilty secret of this pathological exercise in risk-aversion is that all the residents wind up straitjacketed, too.

Though its subject is a depressing one, Kunstler's book is a bracing read. Kunstler, a novelist, has a strong narrative voice and a powerful sense of what a place does to people. Though his history tends, at times, towards glibness, that's an honorable vice



**The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape**  
By James Howard Kunstler  
Simon & Schuster  
304 pp., \$23.00

**Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space**  
Edited by Michael Sorkin  
Noonday Press  
252 pp., \$15.00

in a passionate amateur.

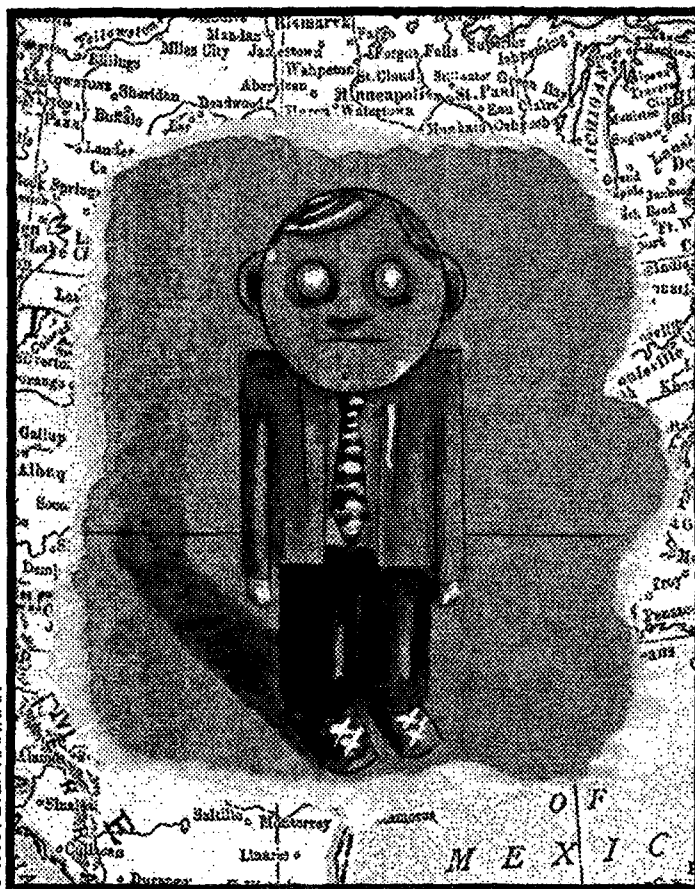
More analytically rigorous, if less Menckenesque, are the eight essays in *Variations on a Theme Park*. The ostensible subjects here range from Silicon Valley to Disneyland, but the underlying theme is the death of public space, and, by extension, the sense of community, in the modern American city. As Michael Sorkin writes in his introduction, the key traits of the new city are an obsession with security, the abolition of any meaningful sense of time and place, and a fascination with simulation, as in the carefully contrived facades of renovated historical districts from coast to coast.

Rutgers professor Neil Smith, lamenting the gentrification of New York's Lower East Side, notes how little has changed since 1874, when baton-wielding cops broke up a labor demonstration in Tompkins Square Park, and 1988, when Mayor Ed Koch railed at anti-condominium rioters in the same park as "anarchists."

Smith carefully demolishes what little remains of the glamour of gentrification. In the midst of the frenzy that was the real estate market of the mid-'80s, the mass media typically characterized gentrification as a noble effort by the well-heeled to subdue the urban frontier. The fashion industry, sensing cold cash in the theme of plucky pioneering, immediately trotted out the Southwestern and safari styles.

But it was not only big money that flattered yuppies with the wherewithal to place a down payment on a brick-walled loft: the artistic avant-garde colluded willingly with multimillionaire developers. Chic salons and galleries with names like Virtual Garrison lent a spurious glamour to what was, at base, just another effort to make a buck. The hip celebration of toughness and street smarts sedulously overlooked the fact that there can be no savage frontier without savages. Smith does not. He reintroduces us to the losers in gentrification—mostly, the working poor. "The homeless," he notes drily, are better described as "the evicted."

Mike Davis does not forget the working poor either. In "Fortress Los Angeles" (adapted from his magisterial survey of L.A., *City of Quartz*), Davis recounts the sobering tale of retailing satrap Alexander Haagen. Long before anyone had heard of the Uebberoth Commission, this erstwhile jukebox



© 1993 PETER HANNAN

salesman cleverly leveraged city redevelopment money to build high-grossing shopping malls in the South-Central area. The fact that Haagen's King Center is fortified like a NORAD base (complete with LAPD substation) hardly tempered his fans' enthusiasm. Haagen hit something of a developer's grand slam, getting government grants and tax breaks, long leases and loads of free publicity.

In "The World in a Shopping Mall," Margaret Crawford indicts the duplicity of mall-mongers, who chat up their demesnes as modern agoras, yet fight any behavior that is not conducive to consumption. The First Amendment is a dead letter in the mall, now that those masters of social control on the Supreme Court have upheld man-

agers' prerogative to banish picketers and petitioners from these carefully controlled interior spaces.

But who would be so crass as to speak up or out in such nice places? The authors return again and again to the notion that outright coercion is no longer needed, now that architects and social scientists (read: market researchers) in the thrall of big money have perfected ways to make us quiescent, sedated, compliant. Vast research efforts go into finding just the right mix of stores to attract the demographically correct shopper. Malls are carefully laid out to effect the Gruen Transfer, named for pioneering architect Victor Gruen: the moment when the determined stride of the inner-directed buyer, hellbent on a specific item, becomes the languid shamle of the outer-directed impulse shopper.

The other authors could use a bit of Smith's and Davis' old left brio. Too often they let their justified anger get lost in the funhouse of postmodern theorizing. With the city barreling toward economic, social and environmental collapse, we need more Jonathan Swift and less Jean Baudrillard.

For all his melodramatic excess, Kunstler seems closer to the mark on why late-20th-century Americans dread the real and love the fake and why they retreat into walled fortresses whenever possible. In retrospect, the privatization of public space appears inevitable, the bastard child of '80s big money, modern construction technology and that time-honored American philosophy—every man for himself. ◀

Kent Miller is a playwright and technical writer living in Seattle.

# School's out

By Michael and Susan Klonsky

**T**he old, urban, factory-model educational systems in cities like Detroit and Chicago are on the verge of collapse. What once was hailed as the hope of the democratic future has become a nightmare, especially for millions of inner-city, mainly non-white children. The democratic issues raised by the struggle to safeguard and transform public education have become central to today's civil rights movement, just as the voting rights issue was 30 years ago.

In his exhaustive history of the Detroit public school system, Northern Illinois University history professor Jeffrey Mirel traces the rise and fall of American public education. Mirel, who has also written insightfully on Chicago school reform, points out that when, in 1987, former Secretary of Education William Bennett described Chicago's schools as "the worst in America," he could have easily applied the same label to the school systems of Detroit, New York, Philadelphia or Baltimore.

What caused this disintegration? Mirel doesn't hold to the racist notion that the schools went downhill when blacks moved in and whites moved out. His research traces the beginning of the deterioration—politically, financially and educationally—to the '30s, a period in which school leadership, staff and student populations were overwhelmingly white. It was then, Mirel charges, that educators began

"warehousing" inner-city kids in the general-education track and steering them away from higher-skills learning and college preparation.

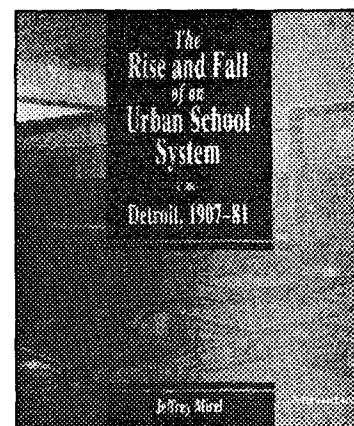
"As educators embraced the custodial mission by diluting educational standards and introducing supposedly relevant and practical courses, urban public schools began to slide into what Arthur Boston called the educational wasteland," Mirel writes. "No groups were more damaged by these developments than working-class and minority youth."

This book is unique in its documentation of the role of the progressive movement, including socialists and organized labor, in developing the Detroit school system into one of the nation's best in the post-World War II years. The liberal-labor-black coalition, which came to power in the late '50s, had by the mid-'60s transformed the Detroit public school system into a national leader in interracial education.

Mirel's vision for public education is bound up with that of the postwar progressive coalition in Detroit. This powerful coalition wrested power away from the segregationists and forged a strongly centralized, desegregated school system. But the failure of integration, combined with the rampant financial crisis of the cities, caused the collapse of this coalition. Ultimately, the public school system was left in shambles.

Taking the side of traditional educational historians like Diane Ravitch and Arthur Schlesinger, Mirel blames the collapse of this coalition partially on the new left and the emerging black power movement of the late '60s. Here his analysis breaks down; he can offer no solution to the school crisis except for the reconstruction of the old centralized systems of the bygone era, a system that failed in its attempt to offer an integrated education to all its students. Liberals have been trying unsuccessfully to recapture the old consensus for the past 20 years, the latest effort coming in the 30th anniversary march on Washington to commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" march.

The real failure of the coalition resulted not as much from black nationalism as from the collapse of the auto industry and the accompanying flight from the city by Detroit's white workers, which led to the present economic and political isolation of the city. Furthermore, the old coalition was based on a set of assumptions and economic conditions (most critically the



**The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-81**  
By Jeffrey Mirel  
University of Michigan Press  
450 pp., \$42.50



continued existence of the smokestack economy) that no longer exist.

The late '60s saw the rise of Detroit's community-control movement, a reaction to the failure of Detroit's school desegregation. The struggle for school decentralization that followed, 20 years later, was crippled by staunch resistance from the unions. Mirel seems puzzled by the continuing efforts of African-Americans to take control of their community schools. At one point he blames the rise of violence—guns, drugs and so on—on “outsiders,” equating the anti-racist protests of '60s activist groups such as the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the Republic of New Africa and Students for a Democratic Society with those committing random acts of violence.

“As a consequence of both organized and random disorder,” says Mirel, “many schools suffered a nearly total breakdown in safety and discipline. Under these circumstances, education was virtually impossible.”

What Mirel doesn't say is that the issue in Detroit and other cities goes beyond simply “saving” public education: the schools must be restructured as well. Reform efforts—such as local school empowerment, schools-within-schools and multicultural and Afrocentric curriculums—are all finding a testing ground in this new wave of reform. In Detroit, for example, the Malcolm X Academy is a highly experimental school that blends African tradition with community mentorships to create new opportunities for

artistic and academic exploration. A new coalition is being formed that aims both to save and to change the school system. This reform movement is very broad; it includes some urban corporations that have, like many of their predecessors, joined up to push their own agendas. Activists from the anti-war and civil rights movements will easily recognize this phenomenon.

Mirel doesn't hold out much hope for this movement. He claims that the fabric of our society is threatened by Afrocentrism and other ideological forces moving into the schools. He defends the melting-potters like Ravitch against the “revisionists,” who he says are traveling “the same fruitless path marked out in the late 1960s” by those who have helped to rip America apart. “The revitalization of urban public schools,” says Mirel, “cannot be based on reforms that threaten to divide Americans further along racial, ethnic, class or religious lines.”

For those school reformers and activists who come out of the '60s tradition, Mirel's history of Detroit schools will be a tough pill to swallow. But there is much in this history that needs to be read. If Mirel is hung up on community control and issues like Afrocentrism, so be it. It will ultimately be the local school communities in Detroit, Chicago and other urban centers that will decide such matters—if the modern school reform movement succeeds. ◀

Michael and Susan Klonsky are Chicago-area education writers.

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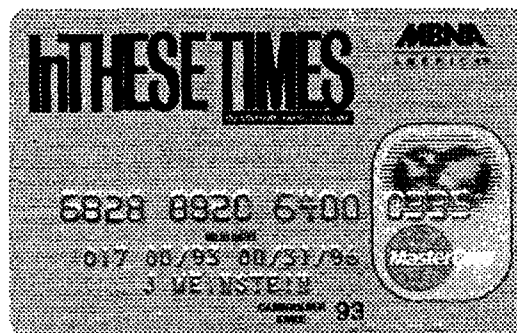
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ITT Editorial....

**I**t wasn't until the introduction of the postmodern In These Times T-shirt that individuals rose up with a collective voice proclaiming their inherent desire to pursue personal interest and look way groovy.

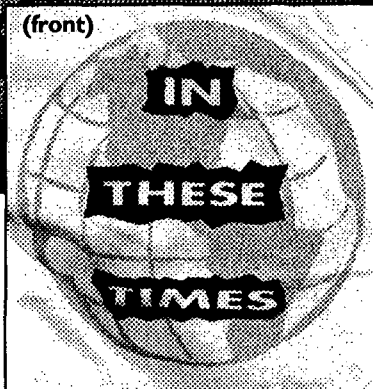


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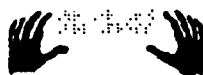
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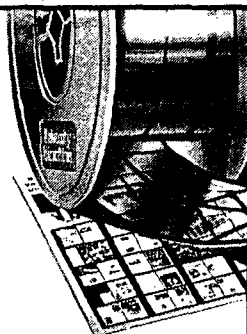


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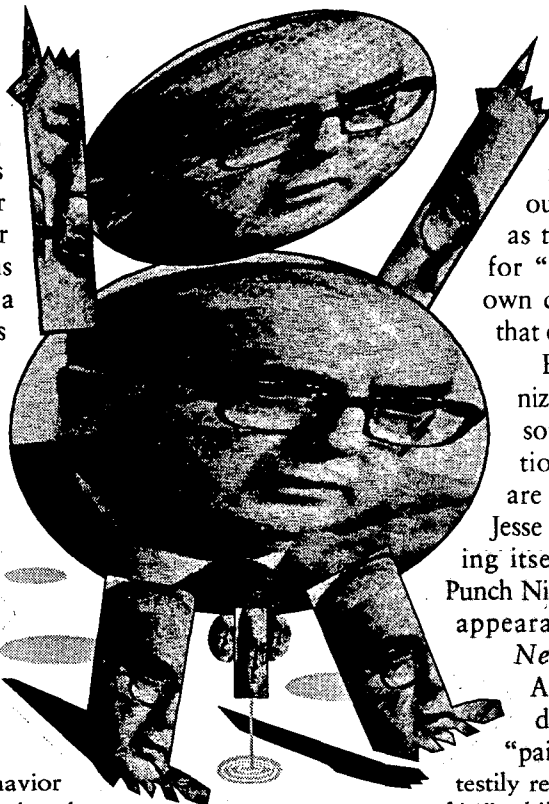
By Terry Southern

**T**he persons most responsible for the deterioration of the quality of life in this country are not, as is generally assumed, the drug lords or the crazed addicts looking for their next fix. No, it is a group of citizens less conspicuous than they; it is a loose coalition of rabid xenophobes whose minds perceive government as an abstraction, which is either "intrusive," "incompetent" or simply "too big."

Their regard for government suggests nothing so much as the reaction of Pleistocene Man when confronted with that first stone scoop of *fire*: scuttling crabwise away from it, grimacing crazily, eyes agog, arms akimbo, fending it off in grotesque squeals and grunts of animal panic.

It is vividly analogous to the behavior of the Sam Nunn, the Bob Dole, the Bob Grahams and the Newt Gingriches when regarding such simple notions as "group planning" and "group endeavor." They have managed to poison and corrupt these ideas and to cloak them in bugaboo superstitions of "bureaucratic socialism" so that we are deprived of much of what other civilized nations take for granted, especially in the realm of the nation's health. Apparently they have never grasped the principles upon which our society was founded: Whatever body of laws might *govern* it, those laws would be *of* and *by* the people—an *extension* of our society, not something distinct from it.

Compared to the more common and perhaps more "natural" follow-the-leader (and devil-take-the-hindmost) forms of social structure, ours is fairly complex, relying less on instinct, cunning and strength than in resorting to such acquired notions as planning and cooperation. It is understandable how the "Leader and Pack" types might not be comfortable in a society pledged to utilize its resources for the benefit of all its members, weak and strong. Indeed, it can be argued that the Dole, the Nunn, the Gingriches, the



Grahams—those people whose behavior flagrantly defies the most basic principles of our social contract—have no morally justifiable place in the culture. It is outrageous when they express, as they frequently do, a concern for "law and order," since their own conduct frequently resembles that of "anarchists."

But even anarchists need organization, and an organization of sorts has evolved, an organization whose principal founders are Sens. Strom Thurmond and Jesse Helms. This group, first calling itself the PPNs (the Proud-as-Punch Nitwits), was born following the appearance of a spunky article by *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis wherein he described the two senators as a "pair of nitwits." To this, Helms testily responded: "Nitwits and proud of it!" while Big Strom added, with characteristic bravura: "Yes, as proud as Punch, you little Commie wop!"

Both men are known to be avid history buffs and to have expressed great admiration for the old Know Nothing movement of the 1850s. It is understandable why they welcomed the Proud-as-Punch Nitwit sobriquet with hearty fervor. Their "PPN" designation, used with great frequency by the media, soon became shortened to the "PPs" and then was vulgarized by the tabloids and the general public into "Pee-Pees."

It is an indication of the temper of Helms and Thurmond, and of their followers, that they did not shy away from this new moniker. To the contrary, they embraced it with defiant relish and almost immediately adopted the gesture of public urination as part of their collective persona. "By our mark shall ye know us!" they proclaimed at a press conference on the lawn of the U.S. Senate and promptly demonstrated their meaning to the gaggle of gawking reporters. These are the persons, bear in mind, whose public paranoia regarding "socialism" or anything that might somehow remind them of it, has denied us not merely the commonsense single-payer solution to health

*Continued on page 39*

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